CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME:

'Écologie Intégrale' as Political Theology among French Catholics

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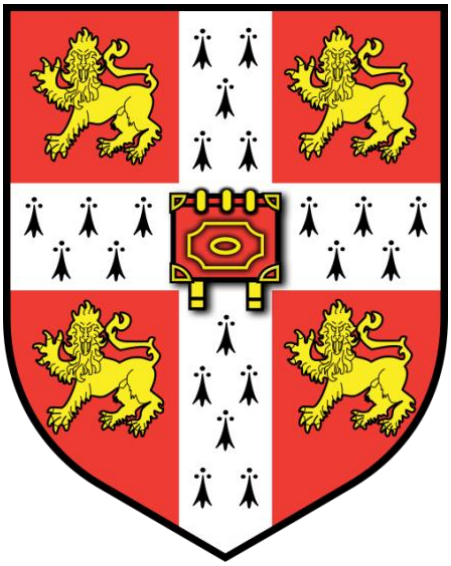

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PREFACE

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Archaeology & Anthropology Degree Committee.

Statement of length

This dissertation is 79,999 words.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of 'integral ecology', a new paradigm of Catholic political theology, through an ethnography of *Les Alternatives Catholiques*, a prominent Lyon-based association of lay Catholic intellectuals. A cornerstone of Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si': On The Care for Our Common Home*, the term 'integral ecology' indexes the synergy between climate change and global socioeconomic inequality, suggesting that 'all is connected'. Drawing on *Laudato Si'*, *Les AlterCathos* host conferences on political participation and green conversion, and run a café as a microcosm for their advocacy of a holistic, environmental and human 'Common Good'. This case study of public Catholic praxis in secular Republican France brings into conversation the concerns of three anthropological traditions, which have respectively addressed Catholic lives, the ethical self-formation of religious actors, and the presence of religion in modern public spheres. Intended as a positive counterpart to the anthropological work on pious religiosity, this thesis aims to take seriously the 'worldly' commitments of religious institutions and actors, suggesting political theology as a locus of anthropological and ethnographic investigation.

Ethnographies of Islam in France have exposed the uneasy place of religion in the secular Republic; here, I offer a parallel inquiry into French Catholicism. I demonstrate, firstly, that the place of Catholics in the French Republic is simultaneously central and marginal – both in their political participation in the public sphere, and in their cultural relationship with the sphere of education. I situate the rise of 'integral ecology' as an explicitly Catholic politics in the national aftermath of the 2012-2013 anti-same-sex-marriage and anti-surrogate-pregnancy protest '*La Manif Pour Tous*', widely viewed by the public as a religious incursion into secular politics. This bioethical protest, predating *Laudato Si'*, ineluctably set the stage for all subsequent attempts by French Catholics to politically or discursively defend 'Nature' and 'mankind'.

It is in this equivocal context that the lay philosophers of *Les Alternatives Catholiques* articulate *Laudato Si'* and the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church into political guidelines, through public conferences. I address the ways in which *Les AlterCathos* authoritatively spearhead a turn to Catholic environmentalism through the day-to-day running of their café and, by including lapsed Catholics and non-Catholics as participants, negotiate the place of belief and piety in their efforts. Finally, I argue that the praxis of integral ecology relies on the cultivation of subsidiarity – and show how this advocacy of small-scale, locally-situated lifestyles runs against two hurdles: the narratives of Republican commentators who fear a reactionary promotion of the (rural and Christian) 'roots' of France, and the discourses of segments of the Catholic population who do uphold just such an 'integralist' stance.

This work offers a case study of lay Catholics' efforts to combine religious, political, and philosophical epistemologies, and to position their praxis within and besides the institutions of the Catholic Church. Attending to the modes of subjectivation of this instance of political theology, the thesis endeavours to showcase the worldly modalities of 'caring for Our Common Home' as a political and spiritual project.

CONTENTS

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My first thanks go to my supervisor, Dr Matei Candea, for showing me that thinking further and more rigorously makes anthropology all the more *exciting*. I am grateful beyond words for his generosity, both intellectual and human, over the years and in recent months.

Of all the cafés in all the towns in all the world, I conducted my fieldwork in theirs: my friends in Le Simone, among Les AlterCathos, and across Lyon have all my thanks, no less heartfelt for being anonymous. It was a privilege to be invited to share the thoughts and projects they care about so deeply, and I hope to have done them justice here.

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My family – my parents Jean-Pierre and Catherine Lardy, my sister Émilienne, my brother Henri, and cousins and aunts and uncles and grandparents – have always been there for me. These past six months, their long-distance 'presence' and love made all the difference. Merci! My regretted great-grandfather Roland Monnet was present also: his well-thumbed books on Christian syndicalism have made it onto my bookshelf and into this bibliography.

Ten years ago exactly I joined the Institution des Chartreux in Lyon, still under the firm impression that my future lay in STEM. Reflecting back, I am grateful to the teachers and classmates of 'la Maison' who put effort into converting me to the Humanities – Monsieur Allezina can claim the first 'I told you so'. It takes special people to change my mind; three in particular were decisive and I owe them all the joy I have found in and through my academic path. Monsieur Aloé made me want to *live* a discipline – as he did philosophy – instead of just studying it. Gustave Ronteix concocted the mad scheme of applying to Cambridge, of all places, in Social Anthropology, of all things. And Bénédicte Bidan, now Soeur Bénédicte de Jésus Crucifié, was the faithful friend who saw me through it all and continues to do so.

Sidney Sussex College has been my home for eight transformative years. Its doors were opened to me by the late Professor Janice Stargardt. She was the sort of Director of Studies who has high expectations of students, tells them so, and then spares no effort to help them meet and exceed these goals. I will forever be grateful that she chose to, in her words, 'give this girl a chance'.

INTRODUCTION

Caring for Our Common Home

> Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.
>
> —— Pope Francis, 2015: §91.

Two journeys bookend this thesis. Not my own to and from the field – arriving in Lyon, France, in late 2016 and departing a little over a year later – but rather journeys taken by a key interlocutor, Marie Sève[1], a young Catholic intellectual whose political convictions she considered best served, on those two momentous occasions, by leaving Lyon to attend pivotal events elsewhere. At the start of this thesis, we are in March 2013, and Marie 'goes up to Paris' to take part in *La Manif Pour Tous*, the massive anti-same-sex-marriage demonstration which captured the attention of the international liberal press with its vehemence, duration, and sheer numerical size. By the end of the thesis, it is July 2018, and Marie flies to Rome. Personally invited to the Vatican, she contributes to its International Conference marking the 3rd anniversary of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. The first event is often analysed as evidence of the abiding and deep-rooted social conservatism of France; of the pervasiveness of right-wing, bourgeois, Catholic morals. The second has

[1] Unless indicated otherwise, all names are pseudonyms. Marie occasionally publishes articles and opinion pieces in French broadsheets and Catholic magazines under the pseudonym 'Marie Sève', and asked me to use this name in my thesis as well.

attracted far less scrutiny – Marie's participation in this conference does not allow such seemingly-easy interpretations of her political leanings or class interests, and while Catholic morals presumably still feature, it is less clear what those morals might be. After all, the conference is convened by Pope Francis, whose Argentinean background contrasts with conventional representations of the 'establishment' of the Holy See, and whose namesake, St Francis of Assisi, was chosen for his love of nature and particular concern for the cause of the poor. The topic at hand, Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, is also considered a game-changer in Catholic spheres – it is at once an environmental manifesto and far more than that. It is an indictment of the global economic system which, according to Francis, drives both climate change and worldwide inequality; and it is a call for the global Catholic Church to develop and implement solutions to these two intertwined worldly ills.

The premises of Marie's two journeys are therefore ostensibly different, yet both events seemed to her sufficiently important to warrant personal attendance, even at the cost of a long cross-country coach ride in 2013, and of international air travel in 2018. This begs the question of how Marie herself reconciled her successive presence at a conservative street protest and an anti-capitalist environmental conference – and indeed whether she reconciled them at all, or had experienced a rupture in the meantime. If Marie's two physical journeys bookend the thesis, then, the body of this work addresses the intellectual, ethical, and to a certain extent spiritual journey she and other Lyonnais interlocutors underwent in the intervening five years, shaping and transforming their conception of 'the political' and of the ways in which, as highly-educated young French Catholics, they can attend to the unfolding social, political, and environmental issues of France and of the world.

In mapping these journeys, this thesis explores lay French Catholics' engagements with 'worldly' politics. In conversation with the anthropological canon on pious religiosity, it addresses religious actors' commitments to building 'good worlds', and suggests political theology – religiously-informed visions of how to order the political – as a locus of anthropological and ethnographic investigation in its own right. The first part tracks the ways in which, in tension with the normative secularism of the French public sphere, conservative middle-class Catholics seek to curate the world of the family, culture, and the nation by casting themselves as representatives of the 'real France'. The second part explores the rise of a new political theology spearheaded by a younger generation of French Catholics, who build on yet seek to transform this set-up. Known as *écologie intégrale*, or 'integral ecology', this new paradigm is a holistic endeavour to protect 'the future of life on Earth' writ large: centred

on the premise that 'everything is connected', it addresses the safekeeping and wellbeing of humanity, biodiversity, and the environment. Overall, the thesis follows the transformation and tensions of Catholic political theologies in France, from a broadly secular engagement with statecraft through which conservative Catholics mediate their place and their public visibility in the French Republic, to a new, ecological Catholic political theology which is no longer centrally indexed on the scale of the nation-state but instead engages on a daily basis in the worldly concerns of many scales, from the local to the entire planet. Throughout, I argue that a thorough anthropological engagement with religious worldly commitments must resist dissolving them into either 'pure politics' or 'pure piety'. Instead, I suggest that we should attend to the scales and defining qualities of the political worlds religious actors negotiate, as well as to the modes of subjectivation through which they endeavour to make these worlds *good*.

Catholicism(s) in secular modern France

'I am often struck,' writes John Bowen in his seminal anthropological study of French Republicanism, 'by the tendency of French public figures to frame the discussion of nearly any important social issue in terms of its long-term history' (2007: 5). My French interlocutors are not (all) public figures, but they agree wholeheartedly that in order to understand the contemporary place of Catholicism in France, 'you must look back' (*ibid*.). In our day-to-day conversations, in casual snippets, they would evoke precise periods of history to illuminate the present day – for example, any contemporary disagreement between French bishops and the Pope, and indeed every agreement as well, was indexed against the 17th and 18th-century history of Gallicanism, when the French King 'by divine right' had as much power as the Pope over the Catholic Church in France. To ground the exploration of French Catholics' 'worldly' engagements conducted in this thesis, they would advise looking to the past to illuminate not only the contemporary relationship of Catholics to the French State, but also the internal pluralism of French Catholicism today.

As a Frenchwoman myself, I also find it instinctive to start with history, although it is perhaps a testament to the many years spent living away from France that I cast no further back than the French Revolution of 1789. Hardly any introduction is necessary there: by toppling the absolutist *Ancien Régime* of monarchy 'by divine right' (*monarchie de droit divin*) and instituting a Republic based on popular sovereignty, the Revolution foundationally recast the place of Catholicism in the French 'state-system' and 'state-idea' both (Abrams

2006). After the Revolution, another date is key in explaining the contemporary place of Catholicism in secular France: 1905, and the 'Law of Separation between Church and State'[2] which established that 'the Republic does not recognise [...] any religion' (Article 2). Both emancipating the State from religious responsibility or interference, and affirming citizens' freedom of religion against interventions of the State, the law set the tone for the emerging principle of *laïcité* (French secularism): since 1905, Republican governments' reluctance to admit religion 'as a visible presence in the public space' (Scot 2003: 20) is due to the informal motto of 'Religion divides, *la République* unites' (Salton 2012 : 139).

'Progressives' vs. 'intransigeants': The question of modernity

1789 and 1905: these iconic dates symbolise, in the collective French imaginary, the institution of the modern, secular French state. They define the place of Catholicism in France 'from the point of view' of the State, as it were. But historians have argued that other key moments of tension, between Catholics themselves, have been crucial in framing the interactions between the Catholic Church and French modernity throughout the 19th and early-20th centuries. These are historical moments to which my interlocutors refer regularly themselves: if I retrace them here, it is not only as a historical overview, but also as an ethnographic evocation. My fieldwork was conducted among highly-educated French Catholics who have strong ties with the academic spheres of Lyon and Paris. They recommended historical and sociological textbooks as a matter of course, and more than that, they regularly offered to put me in touch with the authors – 'my cousin, who wrote the definitive history of Catholic intransigeance in France', 'my friend, who published an analysis of Catholic participation in social movements over the last 50 years'. As a result, the majority of the French sources cited throughout this thesis should be understood as ethnographic objects in their own right: they were written, if not by my own interlocutors, then often by somebody they knew themselves, and my encounter with these books was always mediated by the suggestions, endorsements, or exegetical lenses of French Catholics who were engaged in curating their own story on many levels simultaneously.

French historians – of varying degrees of closeness to 'my field' – have argued that fierce contestations between French Catholicism and secular Republican modernity throughout the 19th and early-20th centuries were powered by a contradictory 'double demand' (*double*

[2] Available online: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000508749/2020-09-25/

exigence) for the French Catholic Church to both be 'of its time' (*de son temps*) and 'combat this time' (*combattre ce temps*) – in other words, to both find ways to inhabit the new secular order of modernity and resist its gradual socio-cultural slide away from the values of Christianity (Pelletier 2019: 279-280). This paradoxical impetus, at several points of the 19th and early-20th centuries, polarized French Catholics according to the progressivism or 'intransigeance' (Frölich 2002; Tincq 2008: 299*ff*) of their engagement with secular modernity – a polarization which also characterized the interventions made *ex cathedra* by Popes who, from the 1880s to the 1920s, offered (occasionally contradictory) guidance regarding French Catholics' navigation of their new secular world. For example, while Pope Leo XIII recommended that French Catholics should inhabit the Republic and protect the interests of the Church 'from the inside' (1884; 1892), Pope Pius X later advised that they should entirely reject the Republican 'Law of Separation' (1906a; 1906b; 1907). Neither Pope managed to coalesce *all* French Catholics into a single opinion, however: as my interlocutors would say, the history of Gallicanism is alive and well anytime a French Catholic chooses not to listen to the Pope.

Key dates in the development of the tension between French Catholic progressives and intransigeants include the *Affaire Dreyfus* in the late 19th century – a complex miscarriage of justice which provoked bitter divisions around matters of antisemitism and loyalty to the Republic – followed by the rising and waning of the *Action française*, a far-right political movement which held sway in the first decades of the 20th century and later returned under the *Régime de Vichy*. Throughout, the tension between progressive and intransigeant Catholics followed a broad Left/Right binary, but these categories indexed changing economic and political stances as time passed: 19th-century 'progressives' accepted the Republic but were economically liberal, while early-20th century 'progressives' started engaging in increasingly social(ist) movements; and 19th-century 'intransigeants' were monarchists while their 20th-century counterparts no longer disputed the Republic but contested any hint of socialism in political and spiritual terms (cf. Pius X 1910).

Indeed, the question of spirituality was an added axis of contestation which did not map clearly onto the Left/Right binaries described above (and still does not, cf. Donegani 1993). The intransigeant, monarchist, antisemitic and anti-Republican *Action française*, led by Charles Maurras, advocated a slogan of *Politique d'abord!* ('politics first') and argued that Catholics should focus their efforts on the political sphere such that France might once again become politically Christian (ideally in the form of a federal monarchy indexed on the

structure of the Church). Against Maurras, philosopher and author Jacques Maritain replied with a text entitled *Primauté du spirituel* ('primacy of the spiritual', 1927) arguing that French Catholics should primarily act '*en catholiques*' – 'as Catholics' in the sense of doctrinal virtue – instead of acting '*en tant que catholiques*', that is, 'explicitly as Catholics' in the sense of public visibility and political mobilisation. Maritain's binary of *en catholiques* vs. *en tant que catholiques*, perhaps best translated into English as a distinction between acting 'as' and '*qua*' Catholics, remained prevalent thereafter to analyse the practices of French Catholics, across the board of progressivism and intransigeance, according to their search for piety and/or visibility.

The history of the 'double demand' for the Church to both inhabit and combat secular modernity will sound familiar to anthropologists of religion. Comparative sociologist José Casanova's ground-breaking study of *Public Religions in the Modern World* also highlights the desire, on the part of the global Catholic Church, to be *both* modern *and* public – and therefore paradoxically anti-modern in its very publicity (1994: 9). However, Casanova attributes the launch of this paradoxical stance to the Council of Vatican II in the mid-1960s: by contrast, French historians contend that, on the smaller scale of France, this articulation occurred far earlier, and had in fact waned by the 1960s. The high-strung battles between progressives and intransigeants – two possible Catholic stances *vis-à-vis* modernity – had, French historians argue, started to lose intensity as early as World War II, as French Catholics of all political sides were faced with the Occupation (R.Dumont 1943; Saudejaud 1999; Pelletier 2019: 188*ff*).

Vatican II and the 'silent revolution': The question of culture

Just as the contestation between progressive and intransigeant Catholics was starting to lose its salience in France, the Council of Vatican II (1962-1965) returned to the question of the relation between Catholicism and modernity on a global scale. While it re-launched a round of moderate confrontations between French partisans and opponents of the *aggiornamento* (literally the modern 'updating' of the Church with reforms to ritual, oecumenism, and the role of the laity), the Council did not spark nearly as much debate in France as the events of the 19th and early-20th centuries had done. Indeed, the 1960s were marked by a generational crisis of transmission which ended with the cultural revolution of May 1968 (Mendras & Cole 1991: 226; Bourg 2007). Not only were previously-strong modalities of progressive or 'left-wing Catholicism' (so-called '*cathos de gauche*', Pelletier & Schlegel 2012) and of

intransigeant anti-modernity (Frölich 2020: 43*ff*) disbanded or dissolved for lack of transmission; there was more broadly a lack of new engagements with and through Vatican II (Pelletier 2019: 245*ff*).

The final two decades of the 20th century are known as the 'silent revolution', a phase of initially imperceptible but eventually profound transformation of the French clergy, which attracted fewer priests and less politicised ones (Béraud 2007; Dumons 2016). The relative 'invisibility' of French Catholics on the public scene throughout this period was entirely in line with the Republican impetus for religion to stay private rather than public (Asad 2006b; Bowen 2007) – and it was offset by the contrastingly visible rise of charismatic Protestantism, often in oecumenical public communities (e.g. Taizé, cf. Itzhak 2016: 250).

Marked by the charismatic but conservative pontificate of John Paul II, the French 'silent revolution' was accompanied, historians argue (Donegani 1993; Pelletier 2019: 279*ff*), by an overall rise in social and moral conservatism among French Catholics. This conservatism, although broadly associated with 'the Right' (Frölich 2002: 154), was framed in terms of 'culture' rather than politics. After the death of John Paul II, the recently-elected Pope Benedict XVI visited Paris in 2008: in a well-known speech, he claimed that French and European culture are grounded in 'Christian roots'. Anthropologist Elayne Oliphant has argued that this narrative has allowed the Catholic Church in France to bring Christian art into the public sphere by labelling it as a shared, and therefore crucially 'secular', national heritage (2015). More broadly, this episode confirmed, in the eyes of historians of French Catholicism, a shift in modalities from the earlier fierce contestations about the putative political impetuses of the Catholic faith, to a perception of 'Catholicism' as a fixed cultural object associated with a 'desire for the past' (*désir de passé*, Pelletier 2019: 284).

Meanwhile, the rising visibility of charismatic Protestantism and especially of Islam in France produced, according to historian Denis Pelletier, a 'feeling' of increasing multiconfessionalism (*un ressenti*) – largely independent from genuine statistical assessments of the relative distribution of religious and non-religious populations in France, and within the former, of the respective proportions of Catholics by contrast with Islam, Protestantism, and Judaism[3] (2019: 302-303). This has led to two significant configurations in terms of the

[3] A 2016 poll cited by Denis Pelletier suggests that the French population is split into roughly 50% Catholics, 40% non-religious, and 10% 'other' religions. Another poll from 2010 detailed 6% for Islam, 3% for Protestantism and 1% for Judaism (2019: 302). These numbers have likely evolved in the intervening years.

'visibility' of Catholicism in the French public sphere in the 21st century. On the one hand, polls suggest that among French Catholics, only a small minority are 'practicing': only about 8% of Catholic respondents declare attending Mass once a month or more (*ibid.*), while the non-practicing majority engage with Catholicism in terms of 'culture' or 'tradition' more than 'faith' (cf. Mayblin 2017; Caille 2017). On the other hand, political efforts on the part of a very small minority of inheritors of the intransigeant, anti-modern Catholic tradition – for example attempts to ban films judged to be blasphemous – have at times taken the spotlight and established highly-publicised narratives *qua* Catholics, overwriting the 'invisible', cultural majority. Presenting themselves as an 'offended religious minority' (*minorité religieuse blessée*, Favret-Saada 2017), these narratives have complicated the image of Catholicism in the French public sphere. Rather than recognisably representing an intransigeant minority *among* French Catholics, these efforts broadcast a public image of French Catholicism *overall* as an intransigeant minority, thereby destabilising longstanding perceptions of Catholics as the 'moral majority' in France (Favret-Saada 2017; cf. also Béraud *et al* 2012).

The return of Catholics on the public stage: The question of nature

Following the early-21st century sedimentation of the image of Catholicism into a widespread cultural identity 'in the background' (Oliphant 2019), a further turning point once more raised the 'question of Catholicism' (Pelletier 2019: 11), that is, the question of its public presence in secular France, and the question of its valence as a political motivator (Clanché 2014; Béraud & Portier 2015a; Fourquet 2018). This turning point is one that my interlocutors took part in themselves, and to which I will return in Chapter One of this thesis: *La Manif Pour Tous*, the 2012-2013 anti-same-sex-marriage 'Demonstration for All' mentioned at the start of this Introduction.

Hundreds of thousands of protesters converged on Paris from all corners of France in opposition to the 'Marriage for All' law proposal. The demonstrators, waving pale pink and light blue flags representing cartoon families with one father, one mother, one son and one daughter, claimed that their refusal of same-sex marriage was motivated by a universal, 'natural' conception of the family (Brustier 2014); and *not* by any religious or political affiliations. But the press, and the government, instead referred to the protest as overarchingly Catholic. Media coverage judged that the protest's 'apolitical and aconfessional independence' was an 'illusion' behind which were 'omnipresent Catholic networks'

(*Libération* 13/09/2013). Some went so far as to claim that the entire protest has been 'orchestrated by the Church' (*OJIM* 22/05/2013). *La Manif* brought 'Catholicism' back to the forefront of French news as a public identity – defined by external commentators if not by the protesters themselves – and as a putative political force, seemingly unified rather than divided as in the previous century.

The media and later sociological studies depicted *La Manif* as an 'anti May-68': an equally large-scale and long-running protest leading to the articulation of new moral ideologies and the politicisation of a generation of French youth (Mendras & Cole 1991: 226*ff*; Bourg 2007; Brustier 2017), albeit a fundamentally repressive and anti-liberal one driven by traditional and powerful Catholic networks (Béraud & Portier 2015a). This set a precedent for viewing Catholic discussions of 'nature', ecology, and environmentalism – launched in this initial case in narratives about the 'natural' family and 'natural' procreation – as nothing more than instrumentalisations of green tropes in service of longstanding conservative agendas. But French Catholics proved to continue to carry out ecological discourses over subsequent years, leaving external commentators largely stymied[4].

Shortly after *La Manif*, in 2015, Pope Francis published an encyclical letter on the topic of environmentalism – its treatment of 'nature', however, is rather different from *Manif* protesters' concern for 'natural' families. In *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis argues that 'everything is connected' among the most pressing ills of the contemporary world, namely climate change and global inequality (Revol & Ricaud 2015). He claims that both are driven and perpetuated by global capitalist systems prioritising technocratic expansion and financial profit over the 'Common Good'. In response, Francis therefore advocates an 'integral ecology' (original Latin: *integra oecologia*, French: *écologie intégrale*; 2015: §137-§162; cf. Danroc & Cazanave 2017), which is 'integral' in that it takes into account the entirety of the planet and its people, and 'ecological', rather than merely environmental, in that it addresses the links and interconnections between all the parts of this whole:

> We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision. Today, the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of

[4] More recent analyses by Bertina (2017) and Raison du Cleuziou (2019) have drawn on long-term research among Catholic spheres (to which one of them belongs personally) to begin interpreting this phenomenon.

> human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment. There is an interrelation between ecosystems and between the various spheres of social interaction, demonstrating yet again that 'the whole is greater than the part'. (Pope Francis 2015: §141)

Recent publications in France have suggested that 'a Catholic moment' is underway in French politics (Boëdec *et al* 2014; J-N.Dumont 2017; Marion 2017), and specifically that one or several '*Laudato Si*' generation(s)' is/are on the rise among young French Catholics (Lang 2020), many of whom, like my interlocutor Marie Sève introduced at the very start of this thesis, first encountered political engagement in the context of *La Manif Pour Tous*. What this thesis is able to address, that earlier political analyses in the immediate aftermath of *La Manif* could not yet, are the contemporary public and political engagements of French Catholics which make reference to 'nature' in diverse and changing ways. How do they attempt to think about and curate the world – building on or moving away from generations of French Catholics who engaged first with the question of modernity and then with that of culture – and how do they manage their actions both 'as' Catholics in terms of doctrine, and '*qua*' Catholics in terms of public visibility?

The anthropology of public religious projects

The dynamics described above in the history of French Catholicism speak to longstanding anthropological engagements with the ways in which religious actors define themselves, work on improving or 'publicizing' their piety, and are defined in turn by the (secular) populations and States around them. This literature illuminates key first steps for a study of contemporary French Catholics' changing public and political engagements.

Religious 'visibility': The question of power

The study of what I call religious 'visibility' – as a shorthand for the two processes of how religion is defined and rendered public – has a long history in anthropology. Talal Asad argued that the definition of 'religion' is a discursive one, which involves relationships of power: the power to produce authoritative knowledge claims about religious truth, and to establish disciplinary practices. The crux here is that this power may be held by religious figures over their own religion, but it may also be held by secular powers over religion. Asad

shows how, in this way, the very definition of 'religion' as an interior, individual faith in a set of propositional beliefs arose after the Reformation; arguing that the category of 'religious' selves, alongside those of 'modern' and 'secular' selves, are all equally shaped by the narratives of Western, modern, liberal nation-states (1993; 2003). In turn, Asad shows that secularism is not simply the absence of religion from the world, but rather that secularization is also a discursive and constructive[5] process in and of itself (1999; 2003; Agrama 2012). Asad's work points to the fact that the 'secularisms' of diverse nation-states are articulated differently (2003: 5), as well as to the observation that these different secularisms in turn 'treat' diverse religious traditions and communities differently (*ibid*. 159*ff*) – in particular, he highlights the ambiguities in discourses defining Europe as the 'home' of 'Christian civilization' by opposition with Islam (*ibid*. 166*ff*).

Paradigmatic of Asad's approach are his explorations of the place of Muslims in the secular French Republic, followed by many others (Asad 1999, 2006b, 2006c; Jansen 2006; Bowen 2007; Silvestri 2007; Iteanu 2013; Fernando 2014). Asad analyses the French 'affair of the veil' in the early-2000s – when Muslim schoolgirls were forced to remove their headscarves on the grounds of *laïcité*, and a law was passed to ban 'religious signs' from schools – as a series of events during which government officials articulated Republican principles in an effort to make sense of the distinctions between the religious and the secular. By exploring the 'affair of the veil', Asad and others therefore shed light not only on Islam but also, crucially, on key tenets of French Republicanism – and their internal contradictions (Bowen 2007; Fernando 2014). The main contradiction at hand is that in the course of defining Republican secularism, or *laïcité*, the French State also comes to label persons who fail to meet its criteria, such as veiled Muslim girls and women: in other words, despite the 1905 principle that 'the Republic recognises no religion', it holds the power to construct religious identities, in addition to its more conventional authority over secular ones (Boyer 2005; Asad 2006b). But if secularism does not 'treat' all religions on the same terms, as outlined above, then it is important to bear in mind that the French Republic's dealings with Islam might not accurately

[5] Before Asad, Carl Schmitt had argued the recursive point that 'all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts' (1985 [1922]: 36). What Schmitt calls 'political theology' – in a definition which differs from that employed throughout this thesis – is an analysis of the systematic structures of political institutions which parallel or originate in religious concepts.

or entirely account for its dealings with Catholicism – a religion discursively 'at home' in Europe – which have not yet been the focus of sustained ethnographic study[6].

Asad's insights illuminate the discursive construction of religious visibility, but also prompt the question of religious 'invisibility', in cases such as the 'silent revolution' whereby French Catholicism became seen primarily as a latent cultural presence in the second half of the 20th century. With reference to Catholicism in India, David Mosse confirms that 'if we have an impression of Catholicism as a coherent and universal cultural system it is because it has been "hard won" through the conscious formation of religion as a distinct category' (in Mayblin *et al* 2017: 4; Mosse 2012, 2017). The (in)visibility of Catholicism in the French public sphere coincides with the view, widely held in the anthropology of religion, that Catholicism has been quite invisible in our discipline itself (Mayblin *et al* 2017: 4; Casanova 1994: 235n7). Following Hann & Goltz' point that there is a 'high degree of congruence [of Catholicism] with secular, national identities' (2010: 5), the editors of the recent reader on the *Anthropology of Catholicism* speculate that,

> Catholicism's presence-as-nonpresence in many Mediterranean ethnographies is indicative not only of its success as a cultural form but also of its politico-historical legacy and subsequent naturalization in the institutional sense. As with other dominant sociocultural positions in Western societies – maleness, for example, or whiteness – that are similarly undeveloped as prominent categories because of the power already wielded by those who occupy them, Catholicism's relative invisibility could, in the southern and eastern European context at least, be linked to its historical connection with deeply entrenched systems of power. (Mayblin, Norget & Napolitano 2017: 4)

In other words, Roman Catholicism has historically been more present in the 'background' (Oliphant 2019) of the anthropology of secularism and modernity, and ironically, of the anthropology of French Islam, than as a central subject of its own, precisely because it is perceived to have 'a kind of immanence combined with immobility, forming part of a 'local'

[6] There are few English-language anthropological explorations of contemporary French Catholicism (Oliphant 2015, 2019; PhD thesis of N. Itzhak 2016), and research from within French ethnology has been sparse as well (Le Wita 1994; Favret-Saada 2017). French sociologists, political scientists, and historians have been more prolific in addressing French Catholicism, especially since *La Manif*, but none of these studies (cited throughout this Introduction) have been translated. Only the work of prominent French sociologist of religion Danièle Hervieu-Léger (1999; 2000 [1993b]; 2003) has, to a certain extent, passed into the English-language anthropological canon.

context' (Coleman 2014: 281). There have been very few [7] studies taking European Catholicism as a starting point – addressing its presence in secular public spheres 'from the bottom up', as it were. But efforts to redress this absence must avoid swinging too far in the other direction: a study of the public sphere 'from the point of view' of Catholicism does not absolve from acknowledging its connections with 'entrenched systems of power' (cf. above) which expand further than 'Catholics' narrowly defined. I have already noted one way in which this is the case in France: there is no clear-cut separation between my 'field' of French Catholic interlocutors, and the academic spheres of France who produce authoritative historical and sociological knowledge about French Catholicism.

Religious politics: The question of the 'theologico-political'

In this thesis, I am interested in looking at how my French Catholic interlocutors engage in and with politics writ large rather than solely secular modernity. To this effect, it is relevant to discuss the body of literature that addresses religiously-motivated forms of politics: often issued from the discipline of history, it largely focuses on pre-modern articulations of religion and politics.

Asad briefly touched on 'the long history since Constantine, in which Christian emperors and kings, lay princes and ecclesiastic administrators, Church reformers and colonial missionaries, have all sought by using power in varying ways to create or maintain the social conditions in which men and women might live Christian lives' (1986: 3). History and divinity studies offer thorough accounts of these institutional intersections between the Catholic Church and politics over time: the most well-known is Ernst Kantorowicz's discussion of *The King's Two Bodies* (1957). What Kantorowicz calls 'political theology' is elsewhere referred to as the 'theologico-political' (Assmann 2000; Lefort 2006; Nancy 2006; de Vries 2006) – I will employ this terminology here in order to keep it distinct from the use of 'political theology' I propose later. The theologico-political complex, most often explored in relation to the Antiquity (Détienne 2006) or medieval Europe (Kantorowicz 1957; Pranger 2006), refers to the

[7] Andrea Muehlebach has notably explored the convergences and disjunctions between Italian Catholic morals and neoliberalism (2009; 2012; 2013). Paolo Heywood also addresses Italian Catholicism (2015; 2018).

> [...] nonseparation and irremovable imbrication of religion and the *polis*, the [...] consubstantiality of the two orders of the *ecclesia* and the imperial state. (de Vries 2006: 29, on Assmann 2000)

The medieval Catholic Church's history of merging with the body politic of European nations is a paradigmatic example of the theologico-political. Among the theorists of contemporary secularism, José Casanova makes the most mention of this period – in fact, he employs it as the basis of his ongoing analytical use of the archaic definition of a 'church' as 'a territorially organized, compulsory religious community coextensive with the political community or state' (1994: 62). He argues that,

> All modern territorial national churches cease to be sociologically speaking a 'church' the moment they cease being compulsory, coercive, monopolistic 'sacramental grace institutions'. This happens either when the church loses its own means of coercion and enforcement, or when the state is no longer willing or able to use its means of coercion to maintain the compulsory and monopolistic position of the church. Indeed, the moment heretical 'sects' and 'apostasy' are officially tolerated within the same political community, or the principle of religious freedom becomes institutionalized, even the still established state church ceases being, strictly speaking, a 'church'. (Casanova 1994: 47)

In this view, there is a strict normative articulation between being a 'church' and politics – and therefore, by adopting the principle of 'religious freedom' during the Council of Vatican II, the Catholic Church ceased to be a 'church' in Casanova's terms. This is an extreme stance, but other (less stringent) authors have also viewed doctrine as a normative reason for aspects of the Catholic Church's relationship with modernity. For example, for controversial Catholic jurist Carl Schmitt, it is because Catholics do not consider Jesus to be a private person that, *as the body of Christ*[8], the Catholic Church must remain visible and public (Schmitt 1996 [1923]: xxii; Hollerich 2019).

However, contemporary anthropology has been reluctant[9] to engage with 'theologico-political' frameworks since Talal Asad's original call for an anthropology of Islam in 1986.

[8] Beyond secular modern politics, the question of the Catholic Church as 'the body of Christ' is of eminent relevance to contemporary studies of the materialities of Catholicism and its gendered, hierarchical, structured bodies (Mayblin 2010, 2014, 2019; Napolitano 2016; Mayblin, Norget, & Napolitano 2017).

[9] After 9/11 especially, authors focused on 'debunking' public narratives about 'violence in Islam', rejecting claims that the Muslim faith *enforces* certain gender relations (Hirschkind & Mahmood 2002) or practices such as martyrdom (Roy 2004). It was critical, intellectually and morally, to avoid normative claims about the

Any contemporary investigation into the ways that Catholicism, Islam, or any other 'world religion' might differently grasp and regulate 'politics' and 'the political' – what I broadly term 'worldly' concerns – must, before anything else, attend to Asad's critique of the characterisations, in Ernest Gellner's work, of Islam and Christianity's 'fundamental' relationships with political power. Asad considered that Gellner's view, cited here, posed problematic analytical premises:

> Islam is the blueprint of a social order. It holds that a set of rules exist, eternal, divinely ordained, and independent of the will of men, which defines the proper ordering of society. [...]
>
> Judaism and Christianity are also blueprints of a social order, but rather less so than Islam. Christianity, from its inception, contained an open recommendation to give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. A faith which begins, and for some time remains, without political power, cannot but accommodate itself to a political order which is not, or is not yet, under its control. [...] Christianity, which initially flourished among the politically disinherited, did not then presume to *be* Caesar. A kind of potential for political modesty has stayed with it ever since those humble beginnings. [...] But the initial success of Islam was so rapid that it had no need to give anything unto Caesar. (Gellner 1981, in Asad 1986: 3)

While Asad's main purpose was to critique the characterization of Islam in such a view, he paused to express a certain doubt *vis-à-vis* the portrayal of 'humble' Christianity as well. It is now relatively widely accepted, in the anthropology of Christianity, that there is a paradox there: the Roman Catholic Church does indeed preach a theology of 'rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's'[10], but simultaneously boasts one of the last remaining religious states of the modern era, the Vatican, as a very tangible reminder of its millennia of imperialist expansion and ubiquitous embodiments as the established church of national body politics (Napolitano & Norget 2009). Throughout this

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'intrinsic politics' of world religions, and to counter clumsy or ill-intentioned comparisons of the figures of Muhammad as Prophet *and* warrior versus Christ's 'render unto Caesar' gospel (Fernando 2014: 270n14). Efforts were also made to disentangle 'Islam' from the economic and socio-cultural deprivations which, it was argued, were responsible for events such as the rioting of young Muslim men in French *banlieues* in the early-2000s (Roy 2005; Iteanu 2013; Fernando 2014: 17).

[10] A teaching which appears in three out of four Biblical Gospels: Matthew 22: 15-22, Mark 12: 13-17, and Luke 20: 20-26.

thesis, the relationship between Catholic doctrine – such as the recently-published encyclical *Laudato Si'* – and Catholic politics will therefore be questioned, rather than assumed.

Public religiosity: The question of piety

The anthropology of religion, particularly since Asad synthesized Alasdair MacIntyre's and Michel Foucault's insights to study religious traditions (Foucault 1977, 1979, 1990, 1992; MacIntyre 1981, 1988; Asad 1986, 1993), is well used to addressing the epistemological work and the relations of power which are entailed in the elaboration and implementation of religious doctrine in general. The anthropology of ethics, also inspired by the early works of Asad, is for its part well used to offering rich ethnographic investigations of how doctrinal discourses are received by religious agents and mobilised in religious self-formation, for example in the contexts of Islamic revivalism (Mahmood 2005; Hirschkind 2006) or Pentecostal and Evangelical Christianity (Harding 2001; Robbins 2004; Luhrmann 2012).

These studies address the presence of religion in public spheres through case studies of religious 'publicization' (Engelke 2013). They call our attention to the 'publics' our religious interlocutors construct (Cody 2011) – those they see themselves as belonging to, and those they address. For instance, when Charles Hirschkind describes the 'public noise' of *da'wa* cassette sermons in Cairo (2001b; 2006), he shows the conflict between Muslim revivalists' attempts to reach the entire population with their pious soundscapes, and the Egyptian state's attempts to return such sensibilities to the private sphere, defining revivalists as a bounded 'counterpublic' (2001a). However, because these studies focus on cases of *deliberate* public religiosity – predicated on collective projects of revivalism, evangelization, or 're-christianization' (Elisha 2011) – they are quite different from *Manif Pour Tous* protesters' reluctance to be categorized *qua* Catholics. They have in common that their key interlocutors tend to be devout, and to participate in collective religious publicity alongside or within individual projects of piety; a premise which cannot be taken for granted in the case of the *Manif*.

What these studies therefore share is an interest in subject-oriented forms of religious self-cultivation, with *teloi* of personal piety, for instance, or individual salvation. And while this focus on the 'government of the self' has on rarer occasions been accompanied by riveting ethnographic investigations of the 'government of others' in religious settings, most studies of the place of politics in Muslim and Christian lives have addressed the cultivation of 'good'

political behaviour through the overarching lens of piety (Deeb 2006; Marshall 2009; Hefner 2000, 2009, 2016, 2017).

Crucially, there have not (yet) been studies of Catholicism within the anthropology of ethics strictly speaking – either in terms of piety or of pious politics. And this is far from a coincidence: indeed, Catholicism is hardly known for its *pious* subjects. Instead, rejoining the historical analyses described earlier with reference to France, the anthropology of Catholicism has pointed out its tolerance for 'non-practicing' or 'cultural' identities. As Maya Mayblin puts it in a seminal article, 'non-believing, religiously indifferent, and ritually disengaged Catholics retain their Catholicism, becoming *lapsed Catholics*' (2017: 504-505). Introducing the recent reader on the *Anthropology of Catholicism*, Mayblin, Norget and Napolitano further elaborate this point:

> It is fairly axiomatic that Catholicism as a marker of identity is not always and everywhere primarily about 'belief'. [...] In the English language, people will refer to themselves as 'Catholic, but nonpracticing'. One also encounters 'lapsed Catholics', 'cultural Catholics', 'ethnic Catholics', 'cradle Catholics', and 'nonobservant Catholics'. Such denotations suggest that Catholicism is open to identifications that index aspects of personhood beyond religious belief – kinship, territoriality, ethnicity, belonging – identitifications that remain variously distanced, critical, and uncertain with regard to Catholicism's key propositional content. (Mayblin *et al* 2017: 18)

In short, a study of Catholic actors' ethical engagements with public life and politics is not only overdue, but also potentially opens up new and fruitful avenues of investigation. A study of 'Catholic' conceptions of politics must, like all studies in the anthropology of Catholicism, pay particular attention to what is meant emically by 'Catholicism' at all times – renewing Asad's call to observe emic definitions of religion – and attend to the possibility that such 'Catholic' modes of subjectivation might transcend the sphere of doctrine and piety.

'Worldly' religous commitments: The suggestion of political theology

This thesis makes a case for the merits of devoting anthropological attention to political theology: religious discourses which consider not only the pious self, but, more widely, the values and structures of common life in society. These are currently receiving increasing attention in theology and political philosophy (de Vries & Sullivan 2006; Hovey & Phillips 2015, Kim & Day 2017; Cavanaugh & Scott 2019). Rather than remaining the sole province of metaphysical disciplines, I suggest that political theologies should be viewed as productive

loci of ethnographic investigation, supported by the foundations laid by the anthropologies of religion and ethics over recent decades.

While the anthropologies of ethics and religion have jointly been extremely adept at understanding the cultivation of good Muslim or Christian *selves*, they have devoted less attention to the discursive and disciplinary work involved in the production, by religious actors, of *good worlds*. Accordingly, I suggest that we might benefit from scrutinising religious doctrines' and actors' distinctions between the cultivation of a religious self *for the self*, and the cultivation of a religious self *for the world*. The two may, of course, at times be entirely coextensive: Lara Deeb, for instance, illustrates that for 'pious modern' Shi'i women in Lebanon, 'self-improvement should lead a person to truly desire to contribute to her community while also better enabling her to do so effectively' (Deeb 2006: 30-31). Here, 'pious modern' Shi'i women cannot be 'good' for their community separately from the primordial development of their own piety; indeed, it is their very piety which renders them sensible to the needs of the community and their own place in its service.

But this might not always be the case, and the religious articulation of personal goods and worldly goods might be different elsewhere – it is intuitively clear, for example, that Pope Francis's recent encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* foregrounds 'worldly' *teloi* in its discussion of environmental protection and social justice. This, then, is the hallmark of a political theology; and my Lyonnais Catholic interlocutors' self-reflexive efforts to brainstorm and implement lifestyle changes in accordance with *Laudato Si'* should therefore be seen as a conscious process of turning this particular political theology into praxis. Despite their very different national contexts, doctrinal references, and everyday applications, French Catholics' changing engagements in the public sphere and Lebanese Shi'i women's pious praxis of *iltizām* ('commitment' or 'public piety', 2006: 34) can speak to one another through the comparative frame of political theology, insofar as they each develop a vision of the world and of religious actors' roles within it.

The phrase used by Pope Francis – the call for Catholics to 'Care for Our Common Home' – is, to my mind, a 'window into complexity' (Candea 2010: 34) calling forth ethnographic and analytical engagement with religious actors' worldly commitments. *What homes do religious actors care about, and care for?* To what extent are they defined doctrinally or experienced in the everyday, by religious institutions and by lay actors? *What makes them common?* To what extent do these 'common homes' map onto, question, or discard other collective imaginaries such as nations, states, ethnic boundaries, cultures, social movements, and indeed religious

communities? *What forms are taken by religious actors' care for them?* How do they envision their own agency to maintain desired orders and effect desired changes, and through what modes of subjectivation do they endeavour to do so? By defining 'political theologies' as religious visions of how to order the political, I aim to go beyond analytical interventions questioning the adequation between public religions and modernity – a line of analysis which, as outlined earlier, historians of France have argued is no longer relevant to the contemporary place of Catholicism in France.

Moreover, I suggest that attending to the ethnographic modalities of praxes of political theology enriches our understanding of religious ethics in contexts where the pursuit of devotion or piety proves equivocal (Schielke 2009a, 2009b, 2012; Fadil & Fernando 2015; Mayblin 2014, 2017, 2019). Indeed, this new angle allows the contextual study of religious modes of subjectivation developed with specific pursuits in mind, *even if* these prove to be separate from, or not subsumed into, the concomitant cultivation of forms of piety. For example, it allows us to track French Catholics' reception and implementation of Pope Francis's call for an 'integral ecology' *sui generis*, and then to explore whether and how it ties into more classic modes of doctrinal Catholic observance such as charity or chastity (Chapter Five). It allows us to address ethnographic puzzles such as how one might try to be a virtuous (political or environmental) Catholic while simultaneously failing to attend Sunday Mass (Chapter Four). In other words, by forcing us to question the usual 'hierarchical encompassments' of religious virtue (Robbins 1994, 2007, 2013; Robbins & Siikala 2014), a focus on praxes of political theology enables us to be alert to possibly idiosyncratic articulations of religious modes of subjectivation, and to their emic deployments in service of pious *teloi*, but also of political and social ones.

Fieldsite and interlocutors

Lyon

This thesis is grounded in ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Lyon in late-2016, throughout 2017, and for shorter intervals in the summers of 2018 and 2019. Situated in the eastern-centre of metropolitan France, Lyon is the third-largest French city, with a population of half a million *Lyonnais* inhabitants. The *Grand Lyon* ('greater Lyon') metropolis is composed of 59 adjacent towns or *communes*, which add up to 1.4 million inhabitants (INSEE 2016). In this sense, reference to 'Lyon' in this thesis may in fact concern, for example, the towns of

Villeurbanne, Vénissieux, or Caluire-et-Cuire, which physically mesh with the city of Lyon itself (Polère 2014).

Prominently (upper-)middle-class and supported by strong local industries, Lyon has a higher GDP *per capita* than the French average; while there are important economic disparities within the city, those are nevertheless smaller than the inequality present in Paris and Marseille (Buisson & Mignot 2005). Most economic divergences can be mapped onto the nine municipal *arrondissements* (boroughs) which subdivide the city of Lyon, and which have their own councils and town halls. For instance, the central *2ème Arrondissement*, in which I spent most of my time, is known for its fine architecture and concentration of old Lyonnais Catholic families, in particular within the area of Ainay (Reynaud 1999; Thiou 2005; Chapter Four). The Catholic University of Lyon (*UCLy*, Moulinet 2016) has long been installed in Ainay, and attracts large numbers of students in human, economic, and social sciences as well as in law.

The historical coincidence in Lyon of economic driven-ness and Catholic faith is alluded to with the designation of two of its neighbourhoods as 'the hill that works' and 'the hill that prays'. The steep hill of La Croix-Rousse, *la colline qui travaille*, used to be the centre of Lyon's family-based silk industry. The equally-steep hill of Fourvière, *la colline qui prie*, faces it across the River Saône: it is dominated by the prominent basilica *Notre-Dame de Fourvière*, and the slopes of the hill are constellated with convents, monasteries, and private Catholic schools. The Archdiocese of Lyon is the most ancient Catholic diocese in France (Gadille *et al* 1983), and its Archbishop, often a Cardinal, has received since 1079 the additional title of *primat des Gaules* in deference to the post's history as the first bishopric of Roman-era Gaul. The *primat des Gaules* is, in honorific terms, the highest-ranking Catholic official in France, although the Archbishop of Paris often takes precedence in practice (Mas 2007). While other faiths have strong anchors in the city[11], Catholicism remains by far the dominant religion in Lyon, both in terms of the numbers of faithful and of the prevalence of its architectural and cultural patrimony[12].

[11] There are three Orthodox churches, one Anglican church, five Protestant temples, one Jewish synagogue – the *Grande Synagogue de Lyon* – two Buddhist temples, and multiple mosques, the most important being the *Grande Mosquée de Lyon*. However, these religious buildings are far outnumbered by innumerable churches.

[12] The annual 8th of December *Fête des Lumières* ('Lights Festival') is a world-famous event dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Chatelan 2016). The *Basilique Notre-Dame de Fourvière* and the *Primatiale Saint-Jean de Lyon* are UNESCO World Heritage Sites; and the *Église Saint-Nizier de Lyon* is a National Heritage Site.

I had, years before my PhD fieldwork, lived in Lyon for two years as a boarder in a private Catholic high school. When I returned for fieldwork, none of my high school acquaintances remained – nonetheless, my familiarity with the city and with its system of private Catholic schools were assets allowing me to meet new circles of Lyonnais Catholics, introduced below. During my fieldwork, I was only very rarely asked directly if I was Catholic myself (I expand on this in Chapter Four), but I *was* asked about my schooling history when I introduced myself as a Frenchwoman studying in the UK. Disclosing the fact that I had attended a Catholic school in Lyon sufficed to establish – in one interlocutor's words – that I was '*catho*-compatible': not anti-clerical (I expand on this source of worry in Chapter One), and conversant in general Catholic culture (Chapter Two). To the extent that I am indeed a non-practicing but 'cultural' Catholic, I belong to one of the subsets of French Catholicism described earlier in this Introduction – I return below to the complex ways in which this intersected with my interlocutors' own concerns and their expectations of me as a fieldworker.

'La cathosphère'

Within Lyon, my fieldwork was conducted among what is known by some as *la cathosphère*. The Lyonnais 'Cathosphere' is a middle- to upper-class *bourgeois* population. In French, *la bourgeoisie* and the adjective 'bourgeois' index culturally traditional, often highly-educated populations who typically wield more economic, social, and cultural capital than the English 'middle-class', and who value tradition and stability above financial ambition (Le Wita 1994). When I refer to 'bourgeois Catholics' throughout this thesis, I therefore mean an 'old', socio-culturally established bourgeoisie (Bourdieu 2010 [1979]: 302, 312), rather than the aspirational middle-classes defined by the (at times derogatory) term in English. In practice, the *cathosphère* of Lyon is diffusely definable by its participation in an interlocking grid of private Catholic schools, Catholic parishes, and lay Catholic associations ranging from charities to youth organisations, the Scouts, choirs, entrepreneurs' meeting circles, and conference centres (Caille 2017: 179-181; Association diocésaine de Lyon 2017).

The term *cathosphère* is not used by *all* its members, but it is an endogenous term, employed especially by interlocutors who were in a position to survey the diversity of educational, religious, and social bodies administered by Catholics across Lyon (Angleraud *et al* 2016). These interlocutors were employed, for instance, as publicity officers for the diocese, or as reporters for Catholic news outlets, and encountered representatives from the

various segments of the Lyonnais 'Cathosphere' as part of their daily work. They used this term structurally, as a collective reference to these institutions and associations, but also as a synecdoche to highlight the handful of individuals holding key positions of power across one or several of these bodies. Culturally, the term also served as a more tongue-in-cheek designation of the families who orbited entirely and only within Catholic circles to satisfy educational, spiritual, and leisurely needs (these often coincided with the old aristocracy, while most other subsets of the *casthophère* merged at points with the non-Catholic population of Lyon). In Chapter Two, I explore why the designation of Catholics as a '*sphère*' may be fraught in the general context of French Republicanism, and especially in the current context of growing fears over religious communalism (*communautarisme,* Bowen 2007: 156; Fernando 2014) and transformations in the public image of French Catholicism from a 'moral majority' to an ('offended') 'religious minority' (Favret-Saada 2017).

The *cathosphère* can loosely be divided into subsets. I did not have much to do with its minority of the old aristocracy – although I did encounter some who remain monarchist to this day and memorialize the death of King Louis XVI with a Mass every 21st January. I had more contact with what are known as '*les grandes familles lyonnaises*', the 'great Lyonnais families': a series of dynastic families who rose to prominence during Lyon's industrial expansion, and until the end of the 20th century virtually controlled the local economy (Sapy & Desseigne 2013a; 2013b). Catholic with a few exceptions, these families' many children intermarried, cementing economic and social networks of influential community leaders (*les notables*), or joined the Church, strengthening the same families' reach over local spiritual matters. Although their economic supremacy has declined in recent decades, the great Lyonnais families' networks remain significant, and all the more powerful for the fact that declining prestige allows a more discreet, subtle presence in key posts of the local industry, school boards, funding committees, town government, and Church. My own encounters with *les grandes familles* were sporadic rather than ongoing: I was invited to join interlocutors from these networks during public political rallies in the build-up to the 2017 presidential election; I visited several of their homes on the occasion of private political gatherings they hosted during the same period (see Chapter One); and I occasionally met men[13] from these families at their workplace for interviews. During large gatherings, I ensured that my status as

[13] Among the *grandes familles,* I did not develop any close ties with women: political meetings gathered a majority of men. While several introduced me to their wives as my fieldwork progressed, these stay-at-home mothers (Le Wita 1994: 143*ff*) did not become regular interlocutors.

a researcher was explicit and acknowledged by anyone I spoke to, and I do not cite in this thesis anyone whose informed consent was in any doubt.

My fieldwork among *la cathosphère* mainly concerned its majority of members who are neither aristocratic nor part of the *grandes familles*. I met them through semi-private Catholic conference centres (cf. Oliphant 2015) attached to the private Catholic schools forming the backbone of the *cathosphère* (Chapter Two). I refer to them throughout this thesis as 'traditional', 'conservative', 'bourgeois', or 'highly-educated' Catholics depending on respective interlocutors' personal investments in socio-cultural tradition, right-wing conservative politics, bourgeois socio-economic networks, or intellectual spheres and pursuits.

The vast majority of my interlocutors in the *cathosphère* had participated in *La Manif Pour Tous* several years previously – it was the topic they were keenest to discuss when I introduced myself as a researcher. Because I was recognized in the field as '*catho*-compatible', it was expected that I would be sympathetic to – or in agreement with – my interlocutors' choice to protest same-sex marriage. I routinely explained that I would not have gone to *La Manif* myself – but in several cases, unfazed interlocutors replied that I was biased by my years in England: if I had stayed to study in France after high school, they argued, I would most likely have remained in Catholic educational spheres and gone to *La Manif* with classmates and friends. Their expectation that I would treat their stories sympathetically did not wane – however, they made additional efforts to ensure that I got 'the full picture' (*une vue d'ensemble*). Given that I had not participated in the protests myself, they considered that the topic was best tackled by talking to as many demonstrators as possible. I was, throughout the duration of my time in Lyon, continually put in touch with family members, friends, and acquaintances of the interlocutors whom I knew more closely, in order to interview them about their respective experiences of *La Manif*. As a result, I collected a vast number of personal *Manif* histories, shared in 'one-off' interviews by Lyonnais Catholics with whom I did not interact on a regular basis or even at all thereafter. Although express consent was granted for these interviews to be used in my thesis, I have not cited any of them here – I have preferred to cite closer interlocutors whose consent was more thoroughly informed and confirmed over time. They nonetheless contributed to shaping my overall perspective on *La Manif*, described in Chapter One.

I mentioned at the outset of this Introduction that my interlocutors were engaged in curating their own story on several different levels: they explicitly sought to orient my research by

sharing retrospective stories about *La Manif*, recommending historical and sociological books about Catholicism in France, and drawing my attention to the thriving debates they held online[14] about daily news, particularly any press releases concerning Catholicism.

Les Alternatives Catholiques

Within *la cathosphère*, my main interlocutors were an association called *Les Alternatives Catholiques*, or 'Catholic Alternatives'. Marie Sève, introduced at the start of this thesis, is their Vice-President. Founded in 2011 by a group of Catholic graduate students in philosophy and the humanities, *Les AlterCathos* were originally a small-scale reading group whose participants wanted to 'make a link between [their] passion for politics and [their] faith', in Marie's words. Taking an interest in political structures and processes on local and national scales, they used Catholic doctrine as a lens to develop their opinions on current issues, and to structure their own engagement in response.

It is in this vein that they began reflecting on same-sex marriage and parenthood – a key topic of the 2012 presidential elections – and later took part in *La Manif Pour Tous* in 2012-2013. By late-2016, when I started my fieldwork in Lyon, the topic of same-sex marriage was no longer central to *Les AlterCathos*'s interests, contrary to the rest of the *cathosphère*. However, when asked, *AlterCathos* members all referred to *La Manif* as a key moment in the foundation of their association: I retrace this history in Chapter Three. In 2016-2017, *Les AlterCathos* hosted public conferences on political participation and green conversion, drawing on the recently-published encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Their conferences were part of the wider network of conference centres across the *cathosphère*, mentioned above. They also ran a café, called *Le Simone*, as a microcosm for their transition to a Catholic ecology: my fieldwork was centred around this café, which served as a gathering ground for the *cathosphère*.

Neither with *Les AlterCathos*, nor the wider *cathosphère*, did I participate in the ritual lives of those among my interlocutors who were practicing Catholics themselves. This was partly due to the fact that they kept their ritual lives private from one another as well: as one interlocutor put it, they attended different Masses, if they attended Mass at all (Chapter Four).

[14] On blogs, Facebook (where I was added to several 'closed' groups dedicated to discussing the news), and especially Twitter: there is a large and active community of French '*twittos cathos*'.

I did not seek to follow them to church unless they asked me to join them: they did so for a few special events such as the Lyonnais 'Festival of Lights' in honour of the Virgin Mary on December 8th, and I accompanied them on those occasions. More broadly, as I explore throughout this thesis, my interlocutors were engaged in negotiating the articulation between their pious lives and their religiously-motivated political lives – 'making links' between politics and faith, but not merging them. At no point did my interlocutors among *Les AlterCathos* or the *cathosphère* claim that their politics were *unrelated* to piety, or 'just politics' – however, they expressed in complex and occasionally fraught ways that they found it important that politics and religion *could* be kept separate: that it was not all 'just piety' either. Their private ritual lives – private from me and from each other – were part of their negotiation of the intersections between acting piously 'as' Catholics (*en catholiques*) and acting explicitly '*qua*' Catholics (*en tant que catholiques*). As a result, this thesis is self-consciously not 'about' personal piety as a primary object of study. It focuses on the 'worldly' commitments and political engagements of my interlocutors, and addresses their negotiations of piety as and when they arose in the political contexts described.

Outline of the dissertation

The thesis is organised in two parts. Part One explores the contemporary place and public political concerns of conservative bourgeois Catholics – *la cathosphère* – within secular Republican France. It also provides an ethnographic and analytical background for Part Two, which focuses on the intellectual and practical development of a new political theology, called 'integral ecology', by *Les Alternatives Catholiques*.

Part One: France, our common home?

Chapter One explores the place of Catholics in French public politics: taking *La Manif Pour Tous* and its aftermath as an entrypoint, it shows that French Catholics are simultaneously central and problematic to definitions of 'French order'. It argues that the family is a battle ground in conservative Catholics' efforts to curate their vision of the world: paradoxically emerging as public political actors in the course of defending their conception of the private family, conservative Catholics both contend with and challenge – in diverse and uneasy ways – the secular Republican dispensations of public and private. The chapter further shows the contestations which arise around conservative French Catholics' claims to represent the 'real'

or ‘whole’ France and its natural order; as they are attacked on the grounds that their protests are the efforts of a minority interest group introducing social *dis*order.

Chapter Two continues this theme with an exploration of the ambiguous place of Catholics in relation to French notions of culture (Bourdieu 1984; Le Wita 1994). It argues that there is a relationship of mutual risk between French Catholic and Republican conceptions of culture, each envisioning itself as protecting a universalist ‘French culture’ which the other degrades through particularist concerns. Ethnographically, Chapter Two takes Catholic conference centres in Lyon as an entrypoint to discuss the French sphere of education and the national trope of ‘public intellectuals’ and philosophers (Bourdieu 1984; Fabiani 1988, 2010). These centres are intended to support private Catholic schools yet remain tethered to the national public education system, and therefore showcase how Catholic intellectuals curate the world of ‘French culture’ by navigating the debated place of Catholic history and philosophy within the peculiarly French category of ‘general culture’ (*culture générale*).

Overall, Part One focuses on the *cathosphère* of conservative, bourgeois Catholics in Lyon, and shows that French secularism – itself reliant in complex ways on visions of the ‘Christian roots’ of ‘European civilization’ (Asad 2003) – allows unique affordances to French Catholics in the public sphere. While Chapters One and Two show that Catholicism is in many ways rendered marginal by the secular Republic, as is Islam (Asad 2006b; Bowen 2007), they also jointly make the case that French Catholics can nonetheless seamlessly imagine themselves to be central to public French politics and culture. In other words, where Maryon McDonald had, in 1989, explored Breton regionalists’ claim that ‘We are not French!’, I show that conservative French Catholics in Lyon engage, in nuanced ways, in claims which go beyond ‘We are French’ to ‘We are *the French*’. By negotiating their public presence in terms of representing the ‘whole’ of France, I argue that French Catholics can to a certain extent act on their own visibility *qua* Catholics (Maritain 1927; Oliphant 2019) and manipulate or resist categorization as a ‘religious minority’ (Favret-Saada 2017).

Part Two: Towards an integral ecology

Within the Lyonnais *cathosphère*, Part Two focuses on the rise of *écologie intégrale* (‘integral ecology’), a new Catholic political theology spearheaded by the lay philosophers of *Les Alternatives Catholiques*. In line with the anthropology of everyday religious ethics (Schielke

& Debevec 2012), I explore *écologie intégrale* both as a new religious 'grand scheme' (Chapters Three & Five) and 'everyday practice' (Chapters Four & Five).

Part Two starts with the third chapter, which retraces the development of *Les Alternatives Catholiques* since their foundation in Lyon in 2011. As mentioned above, *Les AlterCathos* were originally intended as a platform for young Catholics belonging to the *cathosphère* to 'make a link between [their] passion for politics and [their] faith'. In Chapter Three, I show that this initially entailed the development of a 'prefigurative' (Krøijer 2015) Catholic political epistemology, later combined with tenets drawn from the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*, published in 2015. Contributing to anthropological accounts of cultural change and religious transformation (Robbins 2004; 2007b) through a focus on changing political theologies, this chapter argues that the 'grand scheme' (Schielke & Debevec 2012) of *écologie intégrale* challenges the pre-existing political practices of bourgeois Catholics and yet crucially retains and celebrates an attachment to 'roots'.

If Chapter Three primarily focuses on the founders and current Committee-members of *Les AlterCathos*, Chapter Four includes their growing audiences. It explores how *Les AlterCathos* put into practice the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* – their new vision of Catholic politics, elaborated in the previous chapter – in the space of their café '*Le Simone*'. Ethnographically, it tracks the ways in which café customers are introduced to the core tenets of *écologie intégrale*, and how they come to participate in ways which at times include lapsed- and non-Catholics, and at other times enter into conflict with more traditional forms of Catholicism found in the surrounding *cathosphère*. Chapter Four argues that *Les AlterCathos*'s efforts to instantiate *écologie intégrale* and transmit it to new audiences creates but also manages a tension between 'ethics of efficacy' and 'ethics of conviction' among the diverse customer base of *Le Simone*, not all of whom are (practicing) Catholics or invested in the philosophical narratives favoured by *Les AlterCathos*. Contributing to Part Two's investigation of the rise of a new Catholic political theology, this chapter aims to go beyond 'piety' in the study of religious actors' imagination and curation of 'good worlds'.

Finally, Chapter Five observes the ways in which *Les AlterCathos* deploy the Catholic principle of 'subsidiarity' as a mode of subjectivation to orient their personal practice of *écologie intégrale*. It argues that subsidiarity, as a scalar vision of the world, enables *Les AlterCathos* to contribute to the welfare of 'Our Common Home' on many concatenated scales at once, attending simultaneously to local, national, and global scales of climate change and social inequality. It suggests that this mode of subjectivation undercuts previous French Catholic conceptions of politics, explored in Part One, which were predicated on the scale of

the nation-state and on 'Frenchness'. This chapter concludes Part Two's exploration of the core concerns and modes of subjectivation of *écologie intégrale*, as well as the overarching investigation of French Catholic politics conducted throughout this thesis, making the case for anthropological and ethnographic engagements with religious actors' diverse conceptions and curations of 'good worlds'.

Throughout, this thesis addresses the embodiments of several concatenated scales and connected spheres: the small, daily scale of *Les AlterCathos*' café, but also the wider Catholic social spheres of Lyon; the lay and clerical audiences of Catholic conferences across Lyon, but also the wider prestige of philosophers and intellectuals on the national scale of French culture; the putatively private sphere of religion in secular France, but also the wider public debates surrounding Catholic politics since *La Manif*; the nominal modern separation of Church and State, but also the wider universal ambitions of both the French Republic and the Catholic Church. Each of these historical, geographic, social, and ideological scales provides crucial insights to understand recent transformations in 'worldly' commitments among French Catholics: as Pope Francis would put it, 'everything is connected'. I offer snapshots of two particular modes of Catholic engagement with 'worldly' considerations and the political: *la cathosphère* and *Les AlterCathos* share a juxtaposition of traditional socio-cultural roots, French citizenship, and Catholic faith, but I trace how they become articulated into two different 'political theologies'.

In turn, the prism of French Catholics' engagement with political theology allows me to contribute to current debates in the anthropology of secular and neoliberal Europe (Asad 1999, 2003, 2006; Holmes 2000; Muehlebach 2009, 2012, 2013), in the anthropology of everyday and self-reflective ethics (Lambek 2010; Fassin 2012; Laidlaw 2014), as well as to participate in the current expansion of the anthropology of Catholicism (Mayblin 2010; Napolitano 2016; Mayblin, Norget & Napolitano 2017; Nabhan-Warren & Bielo 2019).

PART ONE

France, Our Common Home?

Centrality and Marginality of Catholics in the Republic

CHAPTER ONE

'*La Manif Pour Tous*':

Catholic Families and the Order of the French Public Sphere

This chapter addresses the ways in which family and politics intersect for conservative French Catholics, through the lens of the 2013 anti-same-sex-marriage protest *La Manif Pour Tous* and its aftermath. It argues that the family is a battle ground in French Catholics' efforts to curate their vision of the world: paradoxically emerging as public political actors in the course of defending their conception of the private family, French Catholics both contend with and challenge, in diverse and at times uneasy ways, secular Republican dispensations of public and private. The chapter explores contestations which arise around conservative French Catholics' claims to represent the 'real' or 'whole' France and its natural order – while they are attacked precisely on the grounds that their protests are the efforts of a minority interest group and introduce social *dis*order. Part One of this thesis contributes a new, complementary angle to longstanding anthropological accounts of French Republicanism and secularism: by focusing on the domain of public politics, this chapter formulates a first instantiation of the argument that Catholics in Republican France are in the paradoxical situation of being both marginal in some respects and yet able to claim that they are 'the French'.

Introduction

By definition, millions can claim to have marched in a millions-strong street protest – it is exponentially rarer to be able to take credit for having organised such an event. Marie Sève, depending on who she is talking to, will either simply state that she 'was there' during *La*

Manif Pour Tous, the massive anti-same-sex-marriage demonstration of March 24th 2013 in Paris, or she will confide that she had a small role in its running. Marie, nowadays, no longer campaigns against same-sex marriage; and she worries that her present-day political concerns – 'present' in the ethnographic present of 2017 – will be misconstrued if her interlocutors 'associate her' primarily with anti-same-sex-marriage activism. Nonetheless, she enjoys recalling the practicalities of coordinating a nationwide protest – particularly the political games of representation played between organisers, demontrators, the French government, and the media.

One such game lies in the head-count of protesters – not every protest is a *millions-strong* protest, after all – and this is where Marie became a player. Asked by the *Manif Pour Tous* leaders if she would like to hold a banner during the street march, or perhaps make a speech or give an interview to the press, she requested instead to help with 'the counting'. She was given a handheld device with a thumb-activated clicker, and instructed to click each time a line of ten protesters – an estimate based on the width of the Parisian street – passed by the fixed point where she stood for a few hours' shift. More *Manif* 'clickers' were positioned at strategic points along the streets taken by the demonstration. The police did its own head-count; the official one for administrative records. At the end of the day, both parties released their number: according to *La Manif Pour Tous*, there were 1.4 million protesters, a record-breaking attendance by French standards. According to the police, they were only 300,000. And according to Marie, the wild discrepancy between head-counts is, in and of itself, the most interesting point: it is a hallmark of French public politics.

The symbolic bar of the million participants mattered deeply to protesters, who hoped to signal that their opposition to the law was representative of the whole French population's. The police's head-count, which seemed paltry based on aerial photographs of the event, also mattered: protesters saw in it a marginalizing ploy to prevent this very synecdoche between demonstrators and 'the French people'. Contradictory head-counts are a well-known staple of French street protests, *les manifestations*: it is widely acknowledged that both the police's and protest organisers' numbers are more symbolic than accurate (Denigot 2011). But in the case of *La Manif Pour Tous*, these head-counts *mattered* for an additional reason: the protest having been portrayed in the media as a particularly 'Catholic' one, the head-counts not only symbolised resistance to the government's law proposal, but quantified a visible religious presence in the secular French public sphere.

This chapter's exploration of *La Manif Pour Tous* sets the scene for the thesis's overarching study of recent Catholic politics in secular France. A key paradox of *La Manif Pour Tous* was the protesters' complex efforts to present themselves as a-confessional, secular demonstrators, while the secular media and government instead persistently characterized them as 'Catholic'. *La Manif* therefore allows an exploration of the place of religion in the secular French Republic; fleshing out and in some respects modifying the picture presented by anthropological studies of Islam in French public spheres (Asad 2006b; Bowen 2007; Fernando 2014).

The topic of *La Manif Pour Tous* – same-sex marriage and parenthood – also forms a starting point for the exploration of 'worldly' Catholic commitments which forms the core of this thesis, as *Manif* protesters attempted to curate French law according to their conceptions of the family. *La Manif,* I will suggest, crystallized competing visions of the family held by French Catholics and the French Republic; a debate which encompassed both the 'order of nature' and the 'order of law' (Schneider 1968). 'Kinship has long been used to conceptualize ideas about the bounded integrity of nations', anthropologists have argued (Franklin & McKinnon 2001: 19; Schneider 1969); because kinship can be apprehended as 'a microcosm of the relationship between nature, society, and symbol' (Strathern 1992a: 198) and therefore 'becomes a cultural technology not only for naturalizing relationships but also, and at the same time, for the reverse – for transforming naturalized relations into cultural forms' (Franklin & McKinnon 2001: 16; on Strathern 1992b).

In France, not only does it hold true that the family has historically been a site for the construction of the nation, this process has been peculiarly self-aware and reflective. Historian of ideas Camille Robcis retraces, for example, that:

> Both the 1804 Napoleonic Code and the 1939 Family Code, the foundational texts for French civil law and for family policy, respectively, [...] set up the family as the best unit to organize solidarity and build political consensus, the most universal and most abstractable mode of social representation, and the purest expression of the general will. Both documents insist on the idea that the family is never simply private: as the foundation of the social order, it is intimately connected to the public. (Robcis 2013: 4)

La Manif is therefore worth addressing at the start of this thesis not only because it showcases an instance of religious visibility in the secular public sphere; not only because it introduces contemporary Catholic references to 'Nature' through the topic of 'natural' kinship; but more profoundly because the two feed into one another in French political

philosophy. Debates around the – heteronormative or 'homoparental', 'natural' or legal, secular or religious – family highlight what *counts* in the eyes of French Catholic protesters and the French government as they vie over competing definitions of the natural and cultural, symbolic and political order of France; and in turn define the place of Catholics within such orders.

This chapter therefore investigates the place of Catholics in the public politics of the French Republic through the lens of *La Manif Pour Tous* and its ongoing aftermath in 2017, during my fieldwork. It does not have the vocation of presenting a comprehensive overview of Catholic conceptions of the family, nor of the chronology or rhetorics of *La Manif Pour Tous*[15]. Instead, it focuses on several instances, during *La Manif* and in its aftermath, of deliberations regarding the definition of 'family', of 'Catholics', and of 'Catholic families'; as well as deliberations regarding the assumption that these 'belong' in the private sphere by virtue of their religious and domestic character (Asad 2006b; Bowen 2007; Fernando 2014).

Complementing anthropological works on the marginalization of Islam in the French Republic (*ibid*.), I will argue that French Catholics can be represented as *both* central and marginal in French public politics. I will show how conservative Catholics narratively lay claim to the foundations of French public order, and how they can be seen to threaten it in contexts such as *La Manif Pour Tous*. Overall, I will argue that, in a French secular sphere which is built upon a Christian understanding of 'internal' faith (Asad 1993), conservative Catholics are afforded the possibility of modulating – if not always easily or successfully – the 'visibility' of their presence as religious actors.

French universalism and the place of the family

Debates about same-sex marriage, in France, have never been only about *marriage* – at their core, they are about 'children first' (Bloche & Pécresse 2006). The legalisation of same-sex unions came under consideration in 1982 when homosexuality was decriminalised, but early

[15] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse in detail the stances of French Catholics *vis-à-vis* homosexuality, or other family-related issues such as abortion, in counterpoint to anthropological explorations of religious and modern discourses on these topics (Ginsburg 1998; Paxson 2004; Elisha 2011). However, for thorough analyses of *La Manif Pour Tous*, see Brustier (2014), Clanché (2014), Béraud & Portier (2015a); and for a theological response to recent debates on the family see publications by the Conference of French Bishops (Conférence des Évêques de France 2018).

propositions for a new civil contract – distinct from the existing marriage law – gave rise to fierce debates over the significance of such a reform in terms of the foundations of French political philosophy. The core tenet of this 'French model'[16] of *républicanisme* is abstract universalism:

> To be able to speak and govern in the name of the general interest, of everyone, [is] the guarantee of equality before the law and [preserves] the unity, cohesion, and integration of the French nation. (Robcis 2013: 7)

In the 1980s, proponents and opponents of the creation of a new civil union all articulated their views in terms of Republicanism. For some, same-sex unions were 'deemed anti-republican because they were perceived to be catering to the particular – and hence nonuniversal – interests of homosexuals. They were [...] *communitarian*, the opposite of *republican*' (*ibid*.). For others, the proposed civil contract was 'quintessentially universalist, [because] it refused to distinguish homosexual from heterosexual' (*ibid*.: 241). Beyond the question of equality between couples, the proposed new civil union also raised concerns regarding the equality of children across France. A 'proper' psychosocial development during childhood, it was argued by opponents of same-sex unions at the time, relies on the knowledge of one's biological filiation and the experience of a gendered education: a civil union would, it was thought, legally entrench disparities between the psychosocial development of heterosexual and homosexual couples' children.

It was therefore not so much same-sex alliances as the question of same-sex descent which was felt to threaten the anthropological and psychological 'symbolic order' of the family and the nation (Robcis 2013: 215). As a result, when a new contract, the Civil Solidarity Pact (*Pacte Civil de Solidarité* or *PACS*), was eventually legalised in 1999, it 'essentially encompassed the same rights and benefits as marriage, except for two: filiation and nationality. Unlike married couples, *PACS* contractors could neither acquire French citizenship nor have access to adoption and medically assisted procreation' (Robcis 2013: 262). The *PACS* re-entrenched the link tying the legal and symbolic 'order' of the French nation to the 'order' of the heterosexual family.

[16] The 'French model' of Republicanism has, since 1789, been constituted by opposition to the 'Anglo-Saxon model' of (multicultural) liberalism, and more recently it has come to oppose 'totalitarian models' such fascism, Nazism, and Communism (Bowen 2007: 14-15; Robcis 2013: 8, 242).

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, debates around same-sex marriage in France – contrary to other Western countries – had therefore not pivoted around empirical observations of family configurations, or around human rights discourses: family law, it was contended across the Right/Left spectrum,

> did not simply exist to satisfy individual demands or to confer random 'rights' on individuals. Rather, its primary purpose was to ensure the proper integration of individuals into the social world and to guarantee their psychic wellbeing. Gender, sexuality, and kinship did not simply pertain to the private: they were the universal and transhistorical structures upholding the public, the *état de droit*. (Robcis 2013: 12-13)

But over time, the language of the debates shifted from anthropological and psychosocial considerations – questions of 'symbolic' rather than 'natural' order – to include both biological and rights-based discourses. Following the *PACS*, half a decade of discussions around adoption for same-sex couples were eventually halted by the publication of a right-wing governmental report entitled '*L'Enfant d'abord*', or 'put the children first' (Bloche & Pécresse 2006). It argued that 'the Law should not be seen to support a position that is so far removed from biological reproduction and which does not respect the truth of the biological origin of the child' (Roger 2006: 24, in McCaffrey 2009: 60). The rights *of* the child (*droit de l'enfant*) were declared to trump same-sex couples' and single adults' right *to* have children (*droit à l'enfant*).

The issue was laid to rest until Socialist François Hollande ran for President of the Republic in 2012: one of the cornerstones of his campaign was the promise of 'Marriage for All'. At stake was not the creation of additional rights for same-sex couples, but rather the inclusion of *all* couples into the existing Civil Code in the name of Republican abstract universalism – in other words, the Law of the Republic would henceforth no longer distinguish between heterosexual and homosexual couples in any matter, including the 'universal and transhistorical structures' of filiation and procreation (Robcis 2013).

It is significant that the notion of Republicanism proved so ubiquitous, and was in fact wielded by all sides of the debates to support vastly different stances. This rejoins John Bowen's observation that 'those in government and the media find Republicanism to be the safest place to anchor their particular policies, attacks, and analyses, *especially* when these are under siege' (2007: 11) – yet that 'the history [of Republicanism] they appeal to depends on the precise point they wish to make' (*ibid*. 13). Bowen's observation, however, referred not to policies about the family, but to the 2004 'law of the veil' banning religious signs such as

Islamic headscarves from the secular public sphere. The parallel between the multiple uses of Republican discourses in matters of religion and the family highlights one more takeaway point from this historical overview of debates around same-sex marriage: contrary to 'politicians elsewhere', French political actors have never turned to 'religion, morality, tradition [to] ground their objections against gay marriage and medically assisted reproduction' (Robcis 2013: 1). This avoidance at the level of government highlights, by contrast, any use of religious narratives by civil actors in those debates.

During the buildup to the *PACS* in 1998-1999, anti-*PACS* protesters from civil society – rather than governmental or Parliamentary opponents – had been explicit about their religious motivations, and constituted a 'multi-denominational' *Front de la Foi*, or 'united front of faith' (Béraud & Portier 2015b: 61). When the matter of same-sex unions was raised again in the 2012 'Marriage for All' law proposal, however, the opposition was explicitly presented as a-confessional and 'independent'[17] from all religious hierarchies. While the same Catholic associations which had resisted the *PACS* were, once again, key in organising and funding repeated large-scale street marches throughout the autumn 2012 and spring 2013, they made a point of dubbing these efforts the 'demonstration for all', *La Manif Pour Tous*, and of insisting that their own role was simply that of facilitators for a wider movement defending universal – not religious – family values[18] and natural procreation.

Once more, slogans focused not on same-sex marriage *per se*, but on the rejection of same-sex parenthood: 'Dad + Mum: nothing better for a child!', 'All born from a man and a woman', 'One Dad, one Mum, don't lie to children', 'Dad, Mum, and the kids: it's natural'[19]. While the protest was unsuccessful – 'Marriage for All' was enshrined in law on May 17th 2013 – it gained one major concession: the government backtracked on allowing reproductive technologies to lesbian couples for the time being (Béraud & Portier 2015b: 67).

However, the matter returned to the fore as a polarizing theme of the 2017 presidential election. Several candidates promised to open access to medically-assisted procreation to single women and couples of women, and possibly to surrogacy for male couples. Other

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[17] *La Manif Pour Tous* website: https://www.lamanifpourtous.fr/qui-sommes-nous/mouvement/

[18] *La Manif Pour Tous* website: https://www.lamanifpourtous.fr/qui-sommes-nous/notre-message/

[19] '*Papa + Maman: Y'a pas mieux pour un enfant!*', '*Tous nés d'un père et d'une mère*', '*Un Papa, une Maman, on ne ment pas aux enfants*', '*Papa, Maman, et les enfants: c'est naturel!* '.

candidates instead guaranteed to enshrine biological fertility and procreation as the only legal modes of filiation, or even to revoke the 'Marriage for All' reform outright. Nearly five years after *La Manif Pour Tous*, therefore, its legacy was visible in the widespread assumption that the question of same-sex parenthood would form the litmus test for the constitution of electoral blocks. This is when I arrived to the field: my first few weeks in Lyon in the winter of 2016-2017 were spent attending political meetings, which attempted precisely to convince Lyonnais Catholics that notwithstanding their previous political loyalties, their vote should be cast on the basis of the 'protection of filiation'.

Frigide Barjot and the protection of 'bio' filiation

A key character throughout this chapter is Virginie Tellenne[20], better known across France as 'Frigide Barjot', the most emblematic figurehead of *La Manif Pour Tous*. I met Virginie in Lyon in 2017, and my retrospective understanding of the events of 2012-2013 owes much to her vivid story-telling and to the reminiscences of *Manif* protesters to whom she introduced me. Virginie is a force of nature: in her fifties when I met her, she stood out from bourgeois Catholic women of her generation through her brash, take-charge and take-no-prisoners attitude, and through her signature outfit of a miniskirt, leather jacket, and layered necklaces bearing a tangle of Catholic medals – a carefully curated, stereotype-defying self-presentation as a 'trendy Catholic' (*catho branchée*), as her several autobiographies attest (Tellenne 2011; 2014; 2015).

Virginie has many names. Born Virginie Merle, she was brought up in a well-connected, conservative Catholic family of the Lyonnais bourgeoisie. She left that world by launching a career as a humourist and political commentator in the 1980s in Paris. There, she married a fellow political parodist, becoming at the same time Virginie Tellenne and 'Frigide Barjot', a stage-name pun referring to actress Brigitte Bardot yet literally meaning 'frigid nutcase'. As 'Frigide', she was a well-known pillar of Parisian nightlife, developing wide-ranging friendship networks among the gay cabaret scene. But 'Frigide' was a multi-faceted persona – as 'Frigide', Virginie also publicised her ertswhile loyalty to the *RPR* Gaullist party, then widely talked about the renewal of her Catholic faith after a pilgrimage in 2004, and raised a 100,000-signature-strong petition in support of conservative Pope Benedict XVI in 2009 while his popularity was low. It is still as 'Frigide' that Virginie spearheaded *La Manif Pour*

[20] As a public figure, Virginie is not anonymised.

Tous in 2013, turning her quirky acting persona into a *nom-de-guerre* for the occasion, and trusting that her longstanding friendships with Parisian LGBT+ networks would prove, in the public eye, that her resistance to 'Marriage for All' was motivated by objective legal concerns rather than homophobia.

She met President Hollande, to whom she suggested the creation of a new civil union for same-sex couples: it would improve on the *PACS* by including the same rights as heterosexual parenthood but differ in its legal recording of children's filiation. President Hollande wasn't convinced; unfortunately for Frigide, her co-instigators in *La Manif* weren't convinced either. On the 5th of May 2013, six months after the start of the protests, she was spectacularly ousted from her role as *Manif* spokeswoman by the other leaders, who altogether refused any extension of rights for same-sex couples beyond the existing *PACS*. From that point onwards, 'Frigide Barjot' gave way to Virginie Tellenne, who for a (short) time refocused on her private life and family, which had been upset by the months of turning her duplex flat in Paris into an activist HQ.

When I started my fieldwork in Lyon in late-2016, without knowing much about its Catholic spheres, I searched for events organised by Frigide Barjot, whose name I knew from media coverage of *La Manif*. Frigide had since created an association called *L'Avenir Pour Tous* (*LAVT*), a 'future for all': in 2016 and the spring of 2017, she used *LAVT* as a platform to attempt to influence Catholics' votes in the upcoming presidential election. I first attended a publicly-advertised but poorly-attended *LAVT* conference held in a rented municipal room – there I met Frigide/Virginie Tellenne, who promptly invited me to join a more private version of this same conference, held at a friend's home a few days later, and then gradually started including me in her Lyon-based campaigning more widely.

Frigide/Virginie's campaigning style is rather idiosyncratic. Her conferences involve a long and complex PowerPoint presentation with which she is so familiar that she no longer truly pays attention, in each individual talk, to whether she has actually broached every point or whether her audience is following at all. As Virginie launches into her talk, it is, in my experience, never quite clear what its central topic is supposed to be. In the first forty-five minutes, she touches in rapid-fire succession – and with a feverish delivery shifting bewilderingly from earnestness to deadpan irony and cynicism – on the topics of filiation legislation, the 1956 film *And God Created Woman*, contraception, biological vs. social bodies, transgender parents, the Freemasons, the Original Sin, Catholic stances *vis-à-vis*

homosexuality, smartphone apps to find surrogate mothers in Ukraine, and François Fillon's candidacy to the presidence of the Republic.

Finally she gets to the point of her campaign. It is a strategic one: only two candidates to the upcoming 2017 presidential election, far-right Marine Le Pen and conservative-right François Fillon, plan on firmly prohibiting medically-assisted procreation (*Procréation Médicalement Assistée*, *PMA*) for lesbian couples and single women, as well as surrogate pregnancy (*Gestation Pour Autrui*, *GPA*). However, centrist liberal Emmanuel Macron is likely to reach the second round of the election; he is openly in favour of *PMA*, and Virginie fears that he hides an inclination to support *GPA*. 'It is well-known that he is backed by media mogul Pierre Bergé', Virginie stresses, 'who once said that selling one's womb is after all no different to selling the strength of one's arms'. The goal of *L'Avenir Pour Tous* is therefore to bar Macron (*faire barrage*) from reaching the second round of the election, by ensuring that both Le Pen and Fillon come out on top of the first round. In this scenario, regardless of who wins the final round, 'biological filiation, *la filiation bio* between a man and a woman, will be protected'.

Since polls predict Le Pen will go through, Virginie has been tirelessly campaigning for Fillon for months, holding endless iterations of the same PowerPoint at private 'apartment meetings' (of which I describe an instance at the end of this chapter) and public conferences. I attend several of each, and witness how Virginie promotes Fillon by adapting her opening spiel to her audiences' political leanings. If the audience seemingly gathers a majority of far-right *Front National* voters, Virginie tries to persuade them that, Le Pen being de facto qualified, they should instead vote for Fillon, 'since it's the second place behind Le Pen that is being played – if you vote *FN* in the first round, you'll let Macron go through and risk him winning the second round, and then, *adieu la filiation bio'*.

'*Bio*' is a shorthand for *biologique* or biological. Most obviously, 'biological filiation' in this sense refers to heterosexual descent, but there is an additional layer of meaning – '*bio*' is also a legal label for organic produce. At first, Virginie's reference to descent as *bio* therefore rings oddly; it evokes *bio* free-range chickens or *bio* live-culture yoghurt. But this is precisely her intention: as she makes clearer throughout the meeting, she is not satisfied with definitions of filiation which take DNA into account but allow technical medical interventions. Instead, she wants human procreation to remain *bio*, that is, 'organic' rather than 'fabricated' (*fabriquée*) through genetic manipulation, or mass-produced (*en batterie*) through paid-for surrogacy.

This is an updated vision of the 'order of nature' described by David Schneider fifty years ago (1968), which takes into account the growing availability of reproductive technologies: the 'nature' that Virginie wants to protect, here, refers not only to 'blood' or genetic material (*ibid*.) but also to the very processes of insemination and gestation. Virginie readily states that she believes same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt and raise children, as long as a legal record is kept of the children's birth parents: this does not, in her view, threaten 'human ecology'[21] (*écologie humaine*), that is, the survival of humanity as a species (hence the name of her association, *L'Avenir Pour Tous*, 'a future for all'). Reproductive technologies, however, jeopardise 'human ecology' for two reasons in her book: firstly because they run against the 'order of nature' described above, but also because the recourse to anonymous gamete donations or surrogate mothers perturbs the ability of the State to keep track of, and legally enshrine, the relation between all parties – 'the order of law' (Schneider 1968). For Virginie, the role of the Law is clear: it must not 'lie', that is, it must not replace 'biological truth' with aspirational modes of 'intentional filiation' or 'social fertility'[22].

The presidential election, in Virginie's view, is therefore crucial: if Fillon and Le Pen make it through to the second round and defend '*bio* filiation' in France, this will serve to protect France from the progress of what she calls the 'Anglo-Saxon trend' of 'artificial' or 'rootless' reproduction (*la reproduction artificielle* / *la reproduction hors-sol* – the term *hors-sol* literally means 'out-of-the-earth' and is borrowed from the technical language of hydroponic agriculture). These high stakes are the reason behind her initial investment in *La Manif Pour Tous* in 2012-2013, and her continued tireless campaigning in the year ahead of the 2017 presidential election.

I focused on Virginie alone in this section, but, overwhelmingly, my interlocutors from the Lyonnais *cathosphère* (cf. Thesis Introduction) explained their participation in *La Manif* and their ongoing investment before the 2017 election in similar terms. While most did not have as detailed a narrative as Virginie's, all referred to the 'protection of filiation' as a key

[21] On *écologie humaine* and *écologie intégrale*, see Chapter Three.

[22] The question of whether the Law is meant to be performative or transformative is a long-standing one in France (Thomas 2011): in the first instance (inherited from medieval Christianity), the Law is meant to enshrine empirical precedent, while in the second (inherited from Roman Antiquity), the Law is intended to create new abstractions which transcend the limitations of reality. The very foundations of the French Republic oscillate on this knife's edge: the core tenet of Republican equality is meant to ensure judicial equality (*égalité en droit*), sublimating the (in)equality of citizens in fact (*(in)égalité de fait*).

motivation. This yields several important observations. If my interlocutors' participation in *La Manif* wasn't primarily concerned with same-sex marriage *per se* but with its correlates in terms of reproduction and filiation, then it was more than an attempt to intervene in the rights of same-sex couples[23]: it was an effort to control something they felt *they* had a stake in, namely the family. Moreover, the way they framed their vision of the family – in terms of 'biological' reproduction and of the duties of the State regarding filiation – meant that in their view, *everyone* with a concern for the future of the family ought to reject the 'Marriage for All' law, on the basis that it was the 'thin end of the wedge' for the disappearance of 'biological filiation'. They therefore approached *La Manif* in the spirit, not of a 'religious minority' defending its own rights, but of a 'moral majority' (Favret-Saada 2017) concerned with the welfare of the entire French population. This did not mean that religion played *no* role in their investment, however, as I explore in the next section.

'Mobilising the Muslims': Inter-faith negotiations and Republican interfaces

Virginie introduced me to two brothers, Thomas and Pierre-Marie Delorme, who had been close associates of hers and helped to launch *La Manif Pour Tous* in Lyon in 2012. In his late-twenties at the time, single and footloose, Thomas Delorme had served as her general factotum throughout the entire duration of *La Manif* in 2012-2013. When 'Frigide' had been replaced in the *Manif Pour Tous* leadership, Thomas had convinced Pierre-Marie, a half-decade his elder, to continue to follow her 'line'. Now in 2017, Pierre-Marie led a settled life: he had a wife, two children, a large house, and he directed a temp agency in a well-to-do neighbourhood of Lyon. Thomas, footloose once more after having clerked for several right-wing parliamentarians since *La Manif*, was supported by his parents financially and devoted his time to attending and facilitating Virginie's rounds of conferences. He was particularly keen to share his recollections of *La Manif* with me – partly as a way to distract himself from his current unemployment.

In 2012-2013, Thomas and Pierre-Marie had actively sought to raise awareness and recruit participants for the incipient *Manif Pour Tous*. In particular, Pierre-Marie had contacted Muslim associations across Lyon. Thomas was the first to mention the topic of Muslim participants in *La Manif*:

[23] None of my interlocutors ever discussed their own sexual identity – they spoke of same-sex couples in the abstract, rather than as persons they might know (or be) themselves.

> My brother, with some Muslim friends, they created *Les Musulmans Pour l'Enfance*, 'Muslims For Childhood'. With a nice logo, little kids in a crescent... I mean I don't know the numbers for sure, but they filled fifty-ish coaches, with Muslims who went up to Paris from Lyon for the demonstrations in March...

The presence of Muslim protesters at *La Manif Pour Tous* came as a surprise to me: I had been under the impression that the demonstration had been overwhelmingly attended by Catholics. Thomas explained that the media representation[24] of the protest as homogeneous, rather than diversified, had been one of the points of contention throughout *La Manif* – I return to this below. At the time, though, 'mobilising the Muslims' had been a priority for Pierre-Marie Delorme. When I asked the latter for more detail, he answered with his signature blunt frankness:

> Yeah I tried to mobilise the Muslims, because they understand what we meant by this *basis* of the family, except they're more violent about it. So first, we had to do some work against homophobia, and once we managed to do *that*, then we did some work to get them to accompany us on those big demonstrations. And by the way, I told them, you did more for your integration as French citizens in 6 months of *Manif*, than in 15 years of joining left-wing anti-racism associations that basically *typecast* you, really.

Pierre-Marie's (patronising) positioning *vis-à-vis* the Muslim associations he was trying to recruit sheds light on the ways in which conservative bourgeois Catholics can frame their own place in France with reference both to other religious populations, and to the Republic.

On the one hand, Pierre-Marie saw the possibility of an interfaith relationship between Catholics *qua* Catholics and Muslims: both populations, in his view, share values progressively lost by the rest of secular society – namely, they each value the primacy of the family. On the other hand, Pierre-Marie's neocolonialist approach renders transparent his implicit judgment of the marginal place of Muslims in the French Republic (Fernando 2014). It is telling that he felt compelled to 'educate' Muslims (Iteanu 2013) in a variety of ways – about 'violence', about homophobia, about 'integration as citizens' – while the majority of Catholic protesters (as well as the minority of Protestant and Jewish demonstrators) he left to their own devices and assumed to master these codes already.

[24] Later analyses in academic political sciences confirm that the presence of Muslims, but also of Evangelical and Jewish associations (Raison du Cleuziou 2019: 209), and the presence of left-wing protesters (*ibid*.: 207), were subsumed into the single image of a Catholic and right-wing protest by media coverage (*ibid*.: 217).

Pierre-Marie positioned himself and Catholics as intermediaries between Muslims and the Republic, capable of teaching the former how to fully integrate into the latter. Integration is a central concern in French political philosophy: new citizens such as children and foreigners can and must assimilate[25] into the body politic of Republican civic nationalism (Bowen 2007; Iteanu 2013; Fernando 2014). Discursively, Pierre-Marie's shift from siding with Muslims against secular modernity, to siding with the Republic against (his assessment of) as-yet-unintegrated 'Others', was seamless. His self-conscious stance as a Republican ambassador *vis-à-vis* Muslim communities showcased the extent to which he, as a Catholic, could imagine himself as a fully-integrated member of the Republic, even as he engaged in protesting the law. In his own view, his critique of the government's law proposal was operated from within the Republic: he sought to exercise his right as a citizen to contest particular politics, without questioning the entire architecture of the state. Indeed, it is *by* protesting in the streets and claiming a stake in the government of the whole nation that he considered his – and Muslims' – duty to the Republic to be fulfilled, and their Republican integration re-affirmed.

In the event, French Muslims unforgivably 'tripped up', in Pierre-Marie's view, and, by exposing '*their*' underlying anti-Republicanism, threatened the public image of the entire protest. Indeed, when representatives of the main religious communities in France released statements outlining their position on the same-sex marriage debate, the stance taken by Muslim leaders stood out. While the Catholic Permanent Episcopal Council and Episcopal Council for the Family, the Council of the Protestant Federation of France, the National Evangelical Council of France, and the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops of France[26], all made reference to 'anthropological', 'psychological', and 'natural' arguments reiterating the 'ontological complementarity of woman and man' (cf. Robcis 2013), the French Council of the Muslim Faith[27] based its protestations on 'Islamic law, Koranic text and prophetic traditions' (Béraud & Portier 2015b: 67-82). In Pierre-Marie's cruder assessment, 'that imam

[25] I return in Chapter Two to the place of education in the construction of the French nation.

[26] In order of listing: the *Conseil Permanent de la Conférence des Évêques de France* (CEF), including its *Conseil Famille et Société*; the *Conseil de la Fédération Protestante de France* (FPF); the *Conseil National des Évangéliques de France* (CNEF); the *Assemblée des Évêques Orthodoxes de France* (AEOF); and the *Conseil Français du Culte Musulman* (CFCM).

[27] It is worth noting that the Chief Rabbi of France's personal statement can be joined with the former group, in its claims to universalism and avoidance of religious arguments (Béraud & Portier 2015b: 81-82).

went and said they were against gay marriage because of the Shari‘a and *bam*, shot us all in the foot’.

In other words, by calling attention to their faith-based motivations, the French Council of the Muslim Faith ultimately failed to show the expected support for a single, ‘natural’ conception of the ‘universal’ family – the common-ground Pierre-Marie imagined them to share with Catholic protesters, against more progressive visions of ‘chosen’ families (Weston 1991). More critically, Pierre-Marie was incensed because Muslim leaders explicitly cast their participation in the protest as a self-motivated one, rather than one concerned with the interests of the whole Republic. In Pierre-Marie’s view, this risked re-casting other religious communities’ involvement as equally particularistic and fundamententally anti-secular.

Interestingly – and here I take some distance from Pierre-Marie’s narrative – none of the news reports I have read from 2013, and none of the academic analyses of *La Manif* published in later years (Brustier 2014; Raison du Cleuziou 2019), dwell at length on the statement by the French Council of the Muslim Faith (*CFCM*). As far as I can tell from archival material, this episode went relatively unnoticed in the grand scheme of the protest, and hardly ‘shot [it] in the foot’, as Pierre-Marie alleged. In this sense, what is significant about the statement by the *CFCM*, for the purposes of this chapter, is not its (debatable) importance on the national public stage, but the way in which Pierre-Marie himself honed in on it as a critical political misstep. His anger towards his Muslim counterparts highlights, by contrast, what he expected a ‘proper’ political participation on the part of religious actors to entail: a self-conscious capacity to moderate their public discourses and present them in a properly Republican frame.

I now turn, in the next sections, to the ways in which conservative Catholics attempted to modulate their own public presence in this way during *La Manif Pour Tous*, showcasing the confidence with which they wield Republican narratives, but also the extent to which their strategies of self-presentation as the ‘moral majority’ (Favret-Saada 2017) can be turned against them. The following sections are based on retrospective accounts compiled in dozens of interviews with conservative bourgeois Catholics in Lyon. They do not aim to present a comprehensive overview of *La Manif Pour Tous*, but rather to highlight a number of ways in which my interlocutors rememorated, four years down the line, the contestations which had taken place in 2013 regarding the place of Catholics in the French public sphere.

Manif memories #1: An orderly protest?

Manifestations are a type of street demonstration which has been part of the French political scene since the end of the nineteenth century (Tartakowsky 2004: 149; 2011), and are now a standard institutional form. They involve a specific spatialisation – they are formed of long walking processions winding through a town following pre-approved routes, often chosen for their symbolic evocations – and a finite temporalisation, lasting for a pre-approved duration within a single day. These two dimensions are mutually constitutive: walking along the same route a day later does not make a *manif*', and equally, one leaves the lawful *manif*' by marching down another street.

This recognisable chronotope[28] defines a '*manif*" by contrast to any other form of political action, and in turn evokes a host of memories, expectations, and assumptions tied to this form. Nowadays, *manifs* are broadly perceived to be politically ineffective (Thorkelson 2016: 502), yet are still considered the paradigmatic form of French political protest. It is therefore a peculiarity of the French political scene – or at least, it was until the 2019-2020 'Yellow Jackets' (*Gilets Jaunes*) changed the landscape of French street protests – that performing a *manifestation* 'properly' or 'correctly' matters as much as the content of the protest: it is the form of the *manifestation* itself which confers the seal of Republicanism onto such public events.

Virginie/Frigide's tenure at the helm of *La Manif Pour Tous* was decisive in setting up the demonstration as a particularly 'orderly' protest. It was she who decreed, as early as the autumn of 2012, that the resistance to 'Marriage for All' would not be religious but would be conducted exclusively in universalist Republican terms and within the bounds of Republican 'public order' (Tellenne 2014; Béraud & Portier 2015a: 92).

While 'Frigide Barjot' did not hide her Catholic faith, she was not otherwise affiliated with the Church – which tried to sustain a neutral position[29] by refusing to explicitly endorse *La*

[28] Chronotopes are spatiotemporal assemblages governed by formal and informal rules, which in turn shape possible and expected behaviours and relationships (Bakhtin 1981: 84; in Valverde 2015: 10). They can be used as analytical frames to explore mutually-constitutive 'logics of space' (Abélès 1991: 262; Iteanu 2013) and 'logics of time' (Thorkelson 2016). Marina Valverde suggests that their use as a tool is particularly interesting when heterogeneous or contradictory spatiotemporal assemblages coexist (2015: 22) – when it seems that matter is 'out of place' or 'out of time' (Douglas 1966).

[29] The Conference of Catholic Bishops published a number of think-pieces in response to the proposed 'Marriage for All' law, but refused to issue an official call for French Catholics to protest or accept the law. This

Manif – or other civil Catholic structures. By contrast, the other key leaders of *La Manif Pour Tous* all had ties to powerful lay Catholic associations: among them was the president of the Catholic Familial Associations (*Associations familiales catholiques*), and boardmembers of the *Fondation Jérôme-Lejeune*, a charity supporting children with disabilities, and of *Alliance VITA*, the main pro-life association in France. None of the leaders claimed to protest by virtue of their Catholic faith – either 'as' or *qua* Catholics in the terms of Jacques Maritain (1927; cf. Thesis Introduction). The fact remained that Frigide alone defied the image of 'traditional Catholicism', not least because she paired her Catholic medals with ostensible rainbow bandanas to signify her attachment to LGBT+ communities.

Frigide's contribution to this organising team, among other things, was her discursive virtuosity in presenting this largely-Catholic leadership in a positive, unifying light: in TV interviews, she insisted on the goodwill and logistical efforts made by all these leaders to coordinate their respective associations into a smoothly-organised collective (Raison du Cleuziou 2019: 204-205). The *Manif*, she insisted, was *bon-enfant*, or 'good-natured', and it was run *en bonne intelligence*, 'in good sense'. She foregrounded the coordination and harmony resulting from the 'selfless efforts' made by each of its constituent associations to coalesce into a single force with a shared national purpose.

Under her impetus, *La Manif Pour Tous* was launched in the public eye with simultaneous manifestations in Paris and Lyon on 17th November 2012. It upped the ante with a '*montée à Paris*' – a call to 'go up to Paris' from across France – on 13th January 2013 which gathered 340,000 to 800,000 protesters. It reached its paroxysm with the demonstration of 24th March 2013 in Paris, gathering 300 000 protesters according to the police but 1.4 million according to the organisers. Throughout, *Manif* leaders insisted repeatedly in TV broadcasts on the orderly, law-abiding character of the demonstration, stressing the polite and 'well-mannered' nature of their activism. My Lyonnais interlocutors, in 2017, recalled this aspect of the *Manif* fondly. Many of them stated that they had never protested before and had, at first, been intimidated at the prospect of marching in the streets – but once they were satisfied that *La Manif* was more 'tranquil' (*tranquille*) and 'tidy' or 'ordered' (*rangé*) than other protests they had seen on television previously, they were reassured. Not only did they return for the following gatherings, they also encouraged friends and family members to participate.

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neutral stance was complicated on the one hand by the attitude of a number of bishops who, in their own names, rallied in favour of *La Manif Pour Tous*, and on the other hand by some prominent Catholic news outlets, who repeatedly called for the Church to take a stance.

Part of the order of the demonstration was achieved through the use of clear Republican symbols. Many mayors and elected representatives from across France 'went up to Paris' to protest: they wore their red-white-and-blue *tricolore* sashes as they walked, arranged in neat rows spaced throughout the procession. Additional homogeneous lines were formed at intervals by young women dressed in the white toga and red phrygian bonnet of the Republican allegory 'Marianne'. By curating itself as a particularly orderly series of *manifestations*, *La Manif* insisted, in the public eye, on the fact that it followed a legitimate and even paradigmatic template for democratic dissent, dating as far back as the Third Republic.

However, this insistence on the 'orderly' nature of the protest backfired as soon as internal disagreements within the leadership group became visible. A few days before the demonstration planned for the 24th of March 2013 in Paris, Béatrice Bourges[30], the president of a pro-life collective and the most explicitly far-right leader of *La Manif Pour Tous*, encouraged her supporters to abandon the planned demonstration route and instead march down the *Avenue des Champs-Élysées* (Béraud & Portier 2015b: 74). *Les Champs-Élysées* symbolise 'France' as a whole: the only events which take place on this iconic avenue – until the recent *Gilets Jaunes* protests – are State events such as the national parade on the 14th of July. Bourges's call to abandon the planned route of the *Manif* and walk down the *Champs-Élysées* therefore held paradoxical symbolic meaning. On the one hand, it aimed to claim a particularly French and Republican symbol, *Les Champs-Élysées*, for itself. On the other hand, this was such a subversion of the usual place of *Les Champs-Élysées* in the national imaginary that it failed to convince, and came across as abusive.

Moreover, Bourges's call threatened the moral high-ground which had so far been maintained through *La Manif*'s 'ordered' temporality and spatial route. Historically, the wilfulness of going off-course from approved demonstration routes is typical of the 'revolutionary right', that is, the anti-Republican far-right (Valence 2011: 120-127). Bourges's call to such wilful disorder led to an immediate crackdown on the part of the other *Manif* leaders, and she was relieved of her duties overnight. Frigide Barjot, still at the helm of the *Manif* at this stage, entrenched this separation by releasing statements indicating that 'all the actions of *La Manif* take place within legal and Republican bounds and observe the decisions of the Police Prefect' (Béraud & Portier 2015a: 92).

[30] Béatrice Bourges is a public figure and is not anonymised here.

However, the bait had been cast: mainstream media shifted their focus from *La Manif* onto Bourges's retaliation. Within a few days, she created her own movement, *Le Printemps Français* ('the French Spring'), a tongue-in-cheek reference to the rejections of authority which had taken place during the Arab Spring a few years prior. On March 24th, *Printemps Français* supporters exited the official route, drawing most of the media coverage to their face-off with riot police on the *Champs-Élysées* (HuffPost 24/03/2013; RTL 25/03/2013).

In 2017, a few of my interlocutors shared that they still held bitter grudges against acquaintances whom they knew to have followed Bourges onto the *Champs-Élysées*. By participating in the *débordements* – the conflictual 'excess' – of Bourges's mini-putsch, they had allowed *La Manif* to be portrayed in the media as a 'risk' to public order, overturning its previous image as an orderly protest. The narrative of risk entailed two levels of analysis: the actual incivilities committed on the *Champs-Élysées* threatened the literal order of the public sphere, and more fundamentally, the affiliation with the anti-Republican far-right threatened the symbolic order of a protest which had otherwise made efforts to remain universal and Republican.

Manif memories #2: A bourgeois protest?

The majority of *manifestations* in France are organised by left-wing syndicates and parties. The rarer right-wing *manifs*, however, tend to gather larger crowds, and to remain particularly memorable. Their larger number of protesters is due to the recurring theme of *la montée à Paris*, 'going up to Paris': in the rare occasions that right-wing *manifs* have occurred, they have drawn demonstrators from across France. During the pro-De Gaulle protest at the end of the May 1968 cultural revolution (Bourg 2007), distinctive regional clothing was encouraged by organisers with the aim of representing the 'true' and entire French population (Valence 2011: 121-122). In Louis Dumont's words, there exists a widespread perception in France of the 'empirical power' or numerical superiority of the Right in counterpoint to the ideological preeminence of the Left since the Revolution (1977: 259). Dumont suggests that left-wing politics, inheritors of the Revolution, are widely perceived as the incarnation of 'Progress', while right-wing politics are linked to tradition and 'Order' (1977: 258). This is a slightly different nuance of 'order' than in the previous section: whereas the orderly performance of a *manif'* allows a symbolic evocation of the Republic – that is, the top-down, abstract state – evocations of right-wing 'order' hint towards 'real' French people, 'from the ground up' and across time.

In 2012-2013, *Manif* demonstrators called upon the implicit codes of this symbolic vision of 'French order': not only did they call forth a long-term past, they also warned of a long-term ability to sustain *La Manif* into the future. In early 2012, François Hollande's presidential campaign slogan – 'change comes now' – had been symptomatic of the Socialist Party's bid to place its presidential term under the sign of progress and of 'creative instantaneity' (Brustier 2014: 52). *La Manif*, in direct response later that year, chanted *on ne lache rien*, 'we won't drop it', 'we won't let anything go'.

My Lyonnais interlocutors recalled that one subset of *La Manif* had been especially evocative in this respect. In the later months of the protest, wishing to amplify the visibility of their resistance to the 'Marriage for All' law beyond the scheduled *manifestations*, protesters in Paris borrowed from the panoply of Occupy protests and began to hold day-and-night 'standing vigils' on the *Place Vendôme*, facing the Ministry of Justice. This new group first called itself *Les Veilleurs Debout*[31], or 'standing vigils/watchmen', before settling on the name *Les Sentinelles*, 'the sentinels'. It is nominally forbidden to congregate on the *Place Vendôme*: by standing immobile in aligned rows, spaced out from one another by a metre or two, *Les Sentinelles* complied with, yet subverted, the legislation preventing unapproved public 'gatherings'. Groups were formed throughout France, holding vigils in front of Town Halls and tribunals to continue expressing resistance to the 'Marriage for All' reform – they carried on after the law was passed, and did not 'drop it', or 'let anything go', until late-2018.

Les Sentinelles brought a new political chronotope to bear on the wider stage of *La Manif Pour Tous*. Like occupation movements elsewhere, my interlocutors explained, the non-stop, night-and-day duration of the vigils aimed at showcasing determination (Taylor 1997, Day & Goddard 2010: 142; Corsín Jiménez & Estalella 2017); and the specific location of the *Place Vendôme* was crucial in two ways. During the daytime, it targeted the Minister of Justice, Christiane Taubira, who had proposed the 'Marriage for All' law and would encounter the protesters when entering or leaving the building. *Les Sentinelles* also remained at night, when the Ministry of Justice is closed and empty of bureaucrats. My Lyonnais interlocutors, several of whom had travelled to Paris to take part in these vigils, explained that their night-time presence alluded to the abstract entity of 'Justice', which is not only permanent, but also impartial and blind in its treatment of citizens over the territory of France. Through the spatialisation and temporalisation of this form of protest, therefore, *Les Sentinelles* made

[31] Not to be confused with *Les Veilleurs*, discussed in Chapter Three.

implicit reference to the wider, all-encompassing chronotope of French citizenship across territory and time (Bowen 2007).

A fruitful comparison can be drawn with the political form of the *ronda* performed by the Argentinean Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo from the late-1970s to the mid-2000s[32]. The Mothers established the *ronda*, their unending protest against the government, by circling the Plaza de Mayo in twos and threes in silence. Eli Thorkelson suggests that this circular form, later borrowed in France by the *Ronde des Obstinés* protest in 2006, produces political momentum by 'enacting a temporal impasse' (2016: 495; Guyer 2007) – instead of walking from point A to point B as a traditional *manif* does, they follow a circle with no beginning nor end. For Thorkelson, the circular demonstration of the *Obstinés* refuses the linear temporality of changes desired by the French government, and therefore desperately sustains the political actors' desired futurity, which the proposed law would otherwise foreclose upon.

If the Argentinean Mothers or the 2006 French *Obstinés* tried to keep their desired future alive by pacing, *Les Sentinelles*, for their part, tried to keep a specific unwanted future from advening. My interlocutors explained, in 2017, that their immobility with *Les Sentinelles* had symbolised their refusal of 'going ahead' with legal reforms (*avancer dans la réforme*). In Thorkelson's terms, their refusal of movement and of change can be seen to 'foreclose on the foreclosure' of their vision of time, humanity, and the law. *Les Sentinelles* stood to signify the continuation of an a-historical, universal model of the couple, the family, and the Nation (Robcis 2013), threatened of rupture, in their view, by same-sex marriage, medically-assisted procreation, and especially surrogate pregnancy. Even detractors of the *Manif* acknowledged at the time that, 'in a world marked by the ephemeral nature of media information', *Les Sentinelles* offered a public embodiment of sustained commitment (Béraud & Portier 2015a: 109).

Les Sentinelles evade usual definitions of progressive left-wing militants whose activism becomes an identity as 'experts of social change' ('Anonymous' 1999), such as the 'Soixante-Huitard' generation of May 1968 (Bourg 2007). Nonetheless, the participants of *La Manif* did nurture a newfound identity: not as experts in change but as gatekeepers of 'Order', of traditional beliefs and values showcased in this 'conservative spring' (Brustier 2014: 139).

[32] Bearing in mind the substantial difference between the physical violence which had been mobilised by the Argentinean dictatorship against the Mothers' families, and the merely symbolic violence against the 'order of the family' denounced by *Manif* protesters (Taylor 1997, Day & Goddard 2010: 142).

However, because this vision of long-term 'Order' is traditionally associated with the Right, it too proved susceptible to critique and backlash. Ever since the rise of televised media, right-wing protests have attempted to resist being 'boxed symbolically within a bourgeois sociology, and thereby lose the incarnation of "the real France"' (Valence 2011: 127). In 1998-1999, the organisers of the anti-*PACS* marches had insisted that demonstrators should come in casual clothes, and specifically 'trainers' (*ibid.*). In 2012-2013, Frigide Barjot masterminded the distribution of thousands of identical pink sweatshirts bearing the *Manif* logo – a cartoon family composed of a father, mother, son, and daughter – to erase visible social denominators. Nonetheless, a close fieldwork interlocutor described his awareness of, and discomfort with, intense class-based scrutiny while he took part in the silent, lined-up, spaced-out vigils of *Les Sentinelles*:

> Because we were all so spread out, it was like being alone. Especially at the start of *Les Sentinelles*, the police (*les forces de l'ordre*)[33] would amass around us in the evenings, surrounding us with vans and flashing lights. 'Forces of order'! as if we weren't already in order, in our little lines[34]! And they outnumbered us and they were in uniform, like a bloc, so the only thing I could think of was the Burberry lining on the collar of my coat and how obvious we all were, and Agnès with her scarf[35], and I hoped not too many people would recognise my face on TV at home.

Indeed, media coverage counteracted *Les Sentinelles*' desired image of collective immutability by making use of the individualistic aspect of their distribution in spaced-out rows. By calling attention to recognisable items of bourgeois clothing such as silk scarves (Le Wita 1994: 58-59, 62-68), by interviewing individual *Sentinelles* and highlighting their personal background and motivations, the private persona of *Manif* participants was brought to the fore. Day & Goddard describe how the Argentinean Mothers' depiction as 'the mad women of the Plaza de Mayo' declared them to be unsuited to either private or public responsibilities (2010: 141) – in the case of *Les Sentinelles*, there was no need to call them 'mad'. By illustrating their individual lives, the coverage overlaid the protesters' visibility with a filter of particularistic, bourgeois matter limiting *La Manif*'s ability to symbolise the 'entirety' of the French people in the public sphere.

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[33] Police forces are called *les forces de l'ordre*, the 'forces of order'.

[34] *Rangs d'oignons*, literally 'onion lines'.

[35] *Foulard*, light – often silk – women's scarves associated with elderly generations or with the conservative Catholic bourgeoisie (Le Wita 1994).

Manif memories #3: A Catholic protest?

Prior to *La Manif Pour Tous*, only two large-scale public demonstrations had been known as 'Catholic protests' – and both had been deliberate protests *qua* Catholics, contrary to *La Manif*. The giant 'Free School' demonstration (*manifestation géante pour l'école libre*) of 24th June 1984 was the first. The government intended to dissolve private confessional schools – most of which are Catholic[36] – and huge swathes of urban and rural, upper- and lower-class, left- and right-wing Catholics all converged onto Paris to defend their local schools, forming an unprecedented procession of 850 000 to 2 million[37] protesters. They secured the continued existence of private schools alongside the public school system – and returned home, to their 'invisible' presence in the 'background' of the French public sphere (Oliphant 2019; Thesis Introduction), for fifteen years before rising again *en masse* to protest against the *PACS* on 7th November 1998 and 31st January 1999. In 2017, my interlocutors told me to keep an ear out for a key phrase, *les cathos sont dans la rue*, 'Catholics are down in the streets', as a marker of the paroxysmic importance of certain political events. Much like right-wing protesters tend to insist that they represent the 'real' France by opposition with 'progressive' left-wing governments (Valence 2011), it has been argued that Catholic demonstrations evoke the rupture of some fundamental aspect of 'normal', 'everyday' French life and values (Fourquet 2018: 54).

By breaking away from the general quiescence of Catholics on the French political scene in the second half of the 20th century, the rare Catholic demonstrations between the 1960s and 2013 drew collective attention to whatever had awoken sleeping giants from their 'background' *longue-durée*. In each case, the matter at hand concerned family: the education of children, and the formation of family units. In both the 1984 'Free School' and 1998-99 *PACS* protests, Catholics became public political actors *qua* Catholics in the process of defending the family from (what they saw as) the interference of the State. In short, it is by attempting to keep the family *private* that Catholics conversely became public political actors.

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[36] I return to the topic of private Catholic schools in Chapter Two.

[37] As mentioned earlier, there are always two head-counts for *manifestations*: the head-count according to the police, and that according to organisers (Denigot 2011). Here, even the official, police-issued head-count of 850,000 protesters was record-breaking.

The same dynamic occurred in 2013, despite *La Manif*'s aspirational self-representation as an a-confessional, universalist protest. In this case, the label of 'Catholicism' was imposed externally instead of being foregrounded by the protesters themselves – but once again, the 'public Catholicism' of the protest hinged on the central place of the private family. One event in particular crystallised the shift from depictions of the *Manif* as a 'bourgeois' protest, to depictions of the *Manif* as a crucially *Catholic* one.

This event was once again the intrusion by the far-right *Printemps Français* onto the *Avenue des Champs-Élysées*, described earlier. In addition to drawing attention to the disorderly 'excesses' (*débordements*) of the protest, it prompted particular media focus onto the presence of children at the *Manif*. In a video which went viral online, a protester can be heard attracting children to the *Champs-Élysées*, where they were met by riot police and tear gas. 'We're taking the kids to the front!', he shouts, in an unwitting and twisted parody of the longstanding watchword of 'children first' in French debates around same-sex parenthood (Bloche & Pécresse 2006; Cousseau 2013). These protesters were lambasted in the press, characterised not only as a 'danger to public order' but also as 'highly naïve' individuals, whose headstrong fixation on the *Champs-Élysées* was 'unsurprising' proof of their lack of tactical and political experience (Clanché 2014: 53). After the uproar over the instrumentalisation of children on the front lines of the *Champs-Élysées*, media commentators drew attention to children as a matter of course. 'They show up with their eight kids!', was a common exclamation and press title (Brustier 2014: 49), and one which my interlocutors still recalled angrily in 2017.

Indeed, this coverage discursively embedded *Manif* protesters within the sociology of large Catholic families, whose 'eight kids' index a religiously-motivated refusal of contraception[38]. In other words, by focusing not only on children but on 'eight' of them, the media coverage operated a subtle shift from highlighting the Catholic *culture* of protesters – conservative and bourgeois, visible in their clothing – to indexing Catholic *faith* properly speaking (cf. Oliphant 2015). Against protesters' efforts to present themselves as a 'moral majority' through the use of Republican and right-wing symbols of order, visible signs of strict doctrinal observance recast them as a 'religious minority' (Favret-Saada 2017). My Lyonnais interlocutors who remembered these incendiary press titles

[38] References to conservative sexual morals have also been used to question the Republican integration of French Muslims (Bowen 2007: 208-241; Fernando 2014: 185-220).

were particularly alert about this move because it served to disaggregate Catholics from each other as well. They recalled debating, with friends and family, whether any of them were protesting *as* Catholics (*en catholiques*, Maritain 1927), that is, whether they squarely placed faith and doctrine at the foundation of their political participation. Most of my Lyonnais interlocutors did not consider their opposition to same-sex marriage to be a doctrinal one, although a few did – but, as one woman put it, she resented that discussions among her friends had turned to question 'what of kind of Catholics are we', as opposed to 'what kind of citizens'.

Conclusion: 'Matter out of place'? A secular stalemate.

Anthropologists of France have long argued that religious presences in the French public sphere highlight the points of friction in the public-private binary, a key element of the French notion of secularism or *laïcité* (Asad 2006b; Bowen 2007). Nominally, political and religious powers are respectively assigned to the public sphere of *laïcité* and to the private sphere of individual sovereignty. However, rather than being a clear-cut domain, 'the public' is polysemic, and somewhat ubiquitous. 'The public' 'has to do with the State' (Bowen 2007 : 14) – therefore administrative buildings, State-sponsored schools, and the staff thereof are 'public' – but it also refers to the visibility and accessibility of 'public spaces' like streets or parks (*ibid*.). Because these diverse definitions of 'the public' intersect awkwardly, Talal Asad has shown that the Republic, far from never 'recognising' religion, instead obtains power over the exercise of religious activity within what it chooses to consider 'public'. For example, the 2004 'affair of the veil' has been presented by French government officials as an attempt to protect the guiding Republican value of (gender) equality in the 'public' space of schools (Iteanu 2013; Fernando 2014). In this perspective, legal steps taken to remove religious signs from the public sphere are but one case, among others, of the Republican readiness to restrict fundamental individual rights for the sake of the primacy of 'public order' (Gervier 2014; Boyer 2005).

In March 2013, by calling attention to the protesters' large families with 'eight children', the media were therefore tapping into a longer history of considering religion as an irruption of 'private matter'. From a Republican standpoint, the question in such cases is whether the irruptive matter can be shifted back into the private sphere at all, in order to return the public sphere to its protected, universalist, Republican character (Boyer 2005). Asad makes the case that Islamic veils have been considered 'displaceable' religious signs in this way: insofar as

they are wearables, a 2004 governmental ruling decreed that headscarves are indeed 'signs' which can be removed without threatening the faith of Muslim women (Asad 2006b: 96). This application of *laïcité* was underpinned by a particular definition of faith: a Christian, and more specifically post-Reformation, understanding of religion as an internal, individual practice (Asad 1993). From this[39] Republican perspective, 'public order' is restored when Muslim girls and women leave their headscarves in the private sphere and go forth into public spaces unveiled, without any ostentatious sign of their faith. However, John Bowen has shown that a number of French Muslim women have argued that headscarves are not a 'sign' but, to the contrary, an integral part of their religious identity (2007: 187) – and therefore that their 'whole' selves, headscarf included, ought to have full access to citizenship and visibility in the public sphere. While Bowen points out that this stance was not shared universally among French Muslims in the early-2000s, the point remains that a 'Republican' narrative can be employed to make a case for the inclusion of visible markers of religion as part of an integral public identity, against the arbitrary consideration that Muslim women are equally 'whole' citizens without their scarves.

But this was not part of my Lyonnais interlocutors' own political project. The conception of faith held by my Catholic interlocutors coincides with the post-Reformation understanding of 'internal' belief which, Asad has argued, allows the assumption that religion *can* at all be held separate and private (2003). Frigide/Virginie addresses this head-on in the autobiographies she devoted to her experience of *La Manif*: despite her public proclamations of her faith in the past, she has always '[envisaged] no other definition of faith than an individualist one' (Tellenne 2014: 121; 2015). As far as Virginie and my other Catholic interlocutors in 2017 were concerned, the seat of their Catholic identity was internal; their faith was a personal matter which could not be 'seen' from the outside if they did not choose for it to be.

From their perspective, their faith was therefore entirely compatible with the secular public sphere: it could remain 'private' even as they participated publicly as political agents. It is for this reason that Pierre-Marie Delorme, introduced earlier in this chapter, found Muslim leaders' explicit references to faith-based motivations so distateful and so politically unskilled: in his own view, faith is something one *chooses* to show, not something one *has* to show, especially in the public sphere. The apocryphal 'eight children' were, by the same

[39] It is worth restating here that 'Republicanim' can be used to support multiple stances, and there is no such thing as a single Republican perspective (Bowen 2007: 11-13).

token, a particularly effective symbolic weapon on the part of *Manif* detractors: they were a visible, non-'displaceable' 'sign' (Asad 2006b) of Catholicism as a faithful minority rather than as a cultural 'moral majority' (Favret-Saada 2017). Insofar as the 'eight' children indexed religious observance, they could be wielded symbolically to portray the protest as 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966) in the secular Republican public sphere. My interlocutors in Lyon, especially the younger ones who had never participated in politics before, recalled this symbolic battle, and the loss of control over their own public image, as an unexpectedly painful experience.

But notwithstanding the understandably negative affect shared by my Lyonnais interlocutors who had felt unjustly thwarted in their public participation as citizens, the overall picture painted by these retrospective accounts of *La Manif* is one in which conservative French Catholics appear on the public scene as undeniable agents. Their ability to discursively wield Republican narratives, to symbolically draw on long-term histories of the French nation, and to deliberately modulate their 'visible' persona in the public sphere, resulted in a massively-mediated protest gathering above a million participants (or arguably 300 000), which successfully influenced the law insofar as several clauses widening access to reproductive technologies were struck from the draft for the time being. The contestations about the legitimacy of *Manif* protesters in the public sphere took place on the level of symbols – not of law, as during the 'affair of the veil' which resulted in the tangible, enforceable ban of headscarves on the basis that they were private 'matter out of place' in the public setting of schools (Asad 2006b).

In fact, many of the incidents which spurred passionate public debate over the course of the six months of *La Manif Pour Tous* came down to deliberate provocations on the part of the far-right fringes of the movement. The *Front National,* and the far-right *Manif* offshoot called *Le Printemps Français* (the 'French Spring'), promote an ethnonationalist vision of the French nation-state and dispute the civic nationalism which underpins the Republic (Stolcke 1995). In this sense, the events which were pointed out in the press as 'risks' to public order had been carried out wilfully by anti-Republican demonstrators (Cousseau 2013; Clanché 2014: 53); while the remainder of the *manifestation* proved relatively unimpeachable and symbolically associated itself with several modes of 'French order' in compelling ways.

These representations of 'French order' and of the 'whole' France did not rely on religious narratives themselves. In this sense, Jeanne Favret-Saada's (2017) binary description of French Catholics' shift in status from the French 'moral majority' to an 'offended religious

minority' in the final decades of the 20th century can be inflected: conservative French Catholics, during *La Manif*, were still able to self-portray as a 'moral majority', albeit an (equivocally) 'secular' one. The long-term narrative of right-wing French 'Order', ultimately, yielded secular affordances which *left*-wing Catholics quite possibly would not have been able to claim – to this extent, analyses of the asymmetrical ways in which French *laïcité* intersects with different religious traditions and communities (Bowen 2007; Iteanu 2013; Fernando 2014) can be further complicated by attending to the multivalent political factions within those traditions as well.

Although many of my own interlocutors from the Lyonnais *cathosphère* knew *Front National* voters, in their families or friendship groups, they were for the most part[40] affiliated with conservative but Republican right-wing parties themselves. From their perspective, their efforts to curate the world of the nation-state 'as' Catholics entailed two compatible premises: keeping their private faith *private*, and respecting the secular nature of the public sphere more broadly. The combination of the two required managing, as best they could – and this chapter has shown that this was neither always easy nor always successful – the extent to which they could be labelled *qua* Catholics. In the process of defending their vision of the family during *La Manif Pour Tous*, they had therefore occupied ambiguous, but politically efficacious, positions which were 'Not Private and Not *Not* Private', to paraphrase Rane Willerslev (2004) – and also 'Not Catholic and Not *Not* Catholic', 'Not Secular and Not *Not* Secular'. One identity only was entirely unambiguous, in their minds or in the public eye of the press: they were *French*.

In the next chapter, I continue the exploration of conservative French Catholics' place in the nation-state, this time focusing more directly on the question of this cultural and national(ist) evocation of *Frenchness*. Beforehand, however, one final vignette showcases the fact that conservative French Catholics' aspirational constitution as a 'political force' proved as problematic in the private sphere in 2017, as it had done on the public stage in 2013.

[40] The association explored in Part Two, *Les AlterCathos*, differ in this respect, as I discuss in Chapter Three.

Coda.

Problematic politics at home: An 'apartment meeting'

A few weeks after arriving in Lyon, I am invited to a political meeting hosted by Pierre-Marie Delorme and his brother Thomas, held in the living room of Pierre-Marie and his wife Priscille's home.

Unsure of the etiquette of this event – Virginie called it *un meeting d'appartement*, an 'apartment meeting', which I figure to be an abstract concept since this is patently not a block of flats – I hover at 7.30pm on the doorstep of the large, elegant house in the heights above the River Saône, in the upmarket north-west of Lyon. Before I can knock, a slight but smiling elderly woman opens the door and props it open with a cast-iron umbrella stand. 'Priscille is in the kitchen,' she says, 'so I'll play hostess – come in, have we met?' I introduce myself and my research project, quickly mentioning that I have been invited by Virginie – my hostess is surprised, but makes no comment, and directs me to Virginie herself, who is setting up a projector and screen in a well-proportioned sitting/living room covering most of the ground floor of the house. I make my way towards her, weaving between refined armchairs and delicate end-tables interspersed with fold-away wooden chairs which must have been added specifically for this event.

The chairs catch my attention because they elicit a very different atmosphere from that of the municipal rooms where I have already seen several of Virginie's presentations. In the rented municipal rooms, we sit on plastic chairs – at the end of each evening, I fold them, stack them, and carry them into a storage room, with the other items provided by the municipality to the various users of the space. The folding plastic chairs are ubiquitous to French neighbourhood halls; a sign that although our presence is temporary, it joins a long line of other short-term public events, including other conferences and political gatherings. We are momentarily part of a longer tradition of debate, but the audience is simply an audience, and tomorrow the chairs might seat the spectators of a sporting event. At the Delormes', however, the folding chairs are much nicer, with wooden slats, and clearly rented from a caterer – the wooden folding seats interspersed between the Louis XV armchairs give the still-empty room a unique, 'one-off' feeling, more akin to the wedding Priscille might one day host at home for her daughter. It strikes me then that I do not yet know the Delorme brothers very well, and Priscille even less, but I am a family guest here, not a stanger or a spectator like in the municipal halls.

When I reach Virginie and greet her, she points with a nod of her head towards my elderly hostess, who has retreated back to the front door. Virginie whispers: 'That's Madame Delorme, Thomas and Pierre-Marie's mother, but she was born a Blanc-Gérin, you know, she's one of the younger sisters'.

Although the name itself rings no bells, the tone used to mention it alerts me. '*Les grandes familles lyonnaises*', the great Lyonnais families, are a series of dynastic families who rose to prominence during Lyon's industrial expansion – like me, most Lyonnais inhabitants would recognise the implication of being 'one of the younger sisters' of one such family, while remaining in the dark about the exact names, relationships, and responsibilities of these members of the *haute bourgeoisie*.

The audience for the evening, clustering on the terrace with a glass of red wine and a cigarette, all seem to know each other, and are introduced to me as members of the wider Delorme family, current work colleagues, or long-time family acquaintances and business partners. Some are the directors of large local companies (*les grands patrons*[41]), and a few are elected officials serving as municipal or regional delegates for various right-wing parties. Most are in their thirties, forties and early fifties, with the exception of the older parents of Thomas and Pierre-Marie. There is also the brothers' grandfather, a diminutive, shrunken presence whose wheelchair has been positioned in a ray of sun on the terrace, turning his wispy hair into a glowing halo.

My presence is accepted gracefully despite the private nature of the event – several participants nevertheless verify that I am not an undercover journalist. 'You're not with *Médiapart*?', I am asked a few times, and hasten to confirm that my anthropological project is in no way affiliated with the notorious left-wing investigative magazine. This suspicion, which at first I take for humour and, upon being asked again, start taking more seriously, is mirrored when the meeting starts for good.

As the guests troop into the living room, Priscille Delorme calls for someone at the back to close the French windows. 'We're all *catho*, here, we can speak frankly,' Virginie offers as an opening gambit. The audience rustles. 'Well you see what I mean, we're not going to hide our

[41] *Les grands patrons* are the directors or 'great bosses' of the *grandes familles'* traditional companies or their offshoots. Often this label distinguishes them from the rest of the local business leaders, some of whom wield more local economic power but are not part of these traditional dynasties.

faces[42] here,' she paces the small cleared area in front of the room, 'we all did *La Manif* and we all want to make sure the election goes our way'. But her audience resists, muttering and shifting in their seats. I am surprised by the unease physically displayed by the audience – especially by contrast with their camaraderie minutes earlier over appetizers and drinks. It is also a wholly different reaction from the apathy exhibited by the smattering of attendees a few weeks earlier, when Virginie screened the same PowerPoint at a municipal hall. *This* audience's response makes Virginie's claims, for all that they are obviously true, seem brash and inappropriate, although I cannot at first understand why – if anything, it seems to me that Virginie's attempts to unite the room into a common purpose should have far more traction in this context, where the guests are already linked by familial and business ties. However, the acknowledgement of these pre-existing relationships, re-framed by Virginie into a politicised 'we *cathos*' purpose, elicits a tension which was not felt in other, more public settings.

At the back of the room, the Grandfather Delorme grumbles: 'Your biological filiation thing is all well and good, but can you guarantee that if I vote Fillon in the first round, and then if he wins the second round, he'll abrogate the gay mariage law, and also the abortion law?' The tension ratchets further, but is now turned inward on the Grandfather rather than on Virginie. The young woman next to me, otherwise rigidly polite, coughs out an insult at the Grandfather under her breath; and this finally clarifies what is bothering the audience.

The issue lies with Virginie's grandiloquent insistence on *all Catholics* as a single political lobby. It is unclear whether she is attempting to call forth a doctrinal, pious unity 'as' Catholics, suggesting that there *is* only one way to vote *as Catholics* – something her audience would dispute – or whether her purpose is more performative, in which case her audience considers that their public image *qua* Catholics is not hers to collate, and their vote is not hers to dictate. There are deep-rooted divisions between French Catholics, including among spheres which might appear relatively closely grouped on the right-wing and far-right spectrum. Specifically, only a minority of Catholics, the most intransigent fringe of far-right 'Identitarian'[43] movements, still insist on the abrogation of the *Loi Veil* allowing abortion. The Grandfather Delorme is clearly of this persuasion; and looking around the room, I start to recognise a handful of political figures who had, in March 2013, been associated with

[42] '*Oui enfin vous voyez ce que je veux dire! On va pas se voiler la face ici*'. The expression *se voiler la face* means being deliberately obtuse, but literally evokes someone veiling or hiding their own face.

[43] I return to the topic of 'identitarianism' in Chapter Two.

Béatrice Bourges' far-right breakaway movement, *Le Printemps Français*, as well as its even more radically identitarian pro-life offshoot *Les Survivants* ('the Survivors').

But it seems that a large proportion of the audience is not comfortable with this stance. By piping up at this juncture, the Grandfather Delorme has highlighted the central issue: French Catholics have never coalesced into a community of opinion – one which might draw on its faith *as* Catholics for *sine qua non* conditions (such as, here, 'natural' filiation) transcending the usual political considerations of social and economic policy or foreign affairs. Remarks such as the Grandfather Delorme's occurred during the public versions of Virginie's talks as well, but in municipal halls, the rejection of those comments simply involved a dissociation of strangers – 'Oh! *non*, you go too far!', other audience members would cry. At the Delormes', the borderline-identitarian interjection occurred in front of friends and family. The difficulty of politely taking distance from a distateful point of view expressed by one's elderly host reinforced the sentiment of inextricable *relatedness* of all parties involved. It undercut audience members' clear wish to disavow the very notion of political homogeneity among Catholics, and it infused the situation with a complex sort of *pathos*.

CHAPTER TWO

French *Culture Générale,* Integration or Integralism?

On the Stakes of French Catholic Philosophical Conferences

This chapter addresses the French Catholic bourgeoisie's efforts to protect the transmission of French *culture générale*, or 'general culture', through networks of philosophical conference centres. It argues that the Catholic élite who attend these conferences see themselves as preventing the 'death' of 'French culture', and maintaining its Christian 'roots', not for their own sake but for the sake of the entire French people – despite finding themselves at odds, in this respect, with governmental and Republican conceptions of culture and the nation. A contribution to anthropological discussions of 'cultural Catholicism' and a complementary angle into the longstanding question of French Republicanism, this chapter concludes the argument of Part One of this thesis: by focusing on the domain of national culture, it shows how Catholics in Republican France negotiate the paradoxical situation of being marginal in some respects and yet able to claim that they are the 'real France'.

Introduction

'*Le Collège Supérieur*' and '*Les Alternatives Catholiques*' are two Lyon-based conference centres. Their logos share an aesthetic: founded in 1999, *Le Collège Supérieur* is represented by a line drawing of a woman's head and shoulders, red on a white background. In a few bold penstrokes reminiscent of post-Impressionism, the logo sketches an allegory of *sophía,* or theoretical wisdom: the woman's long nose and straight brows evoke Greek statuary, her hair is only hinted at by a few short curls which could equally be laurels, and her hands, free-

floating near the line of her neck and shoulders, hold up to her face a pen and a sheaf of paper. *Les Alternatives Catholiques*, for their part, have two logos, both of which echo this theme. Their first logo dates back to their creation in 2011; it is a line drawing in the same style, outlining the silhouette of Auguste Rodin's *Thinker* – in orange on a white background, or white on an orange background, variably. The second, additional logo was introduced in 2016, when *Les Alternatives Catholiques* inaugurated a new space in which to host their conferences: this logo is based on a black-and-white photograph rather than a sketch, but it reprises the image of a woman's head and shoulders. Her main features are her short, curly bob of hair, round glasses, and half-smile as she glances to the left of the logo, encircled in a bold yellow frame. Rather than an allegory, this woman is identifiable as Simone Weil, a French philosopher whose main work was completed in the 1930s and early-40s: she is the namesake of *Le Simone*, the café-*cum*-conference-centre run by *Les AlterCathos* in which I conducted the majority of my fieldwork throughout 2017.

All three logos signal that *Le Collège Supérieur* and *Les Alternatives Catholiques* are centrally concerned with philosophy; and tie together two conference centres whose names would otherwise indicate no relation. The name '*Alternatives Catholiques*' does not carry any implicit symbolism and can be straightforwardly translated as 'Catholic Alternatives' – straightforward with the caveat that it is unclear, from their name, how *Les AlterCathos* are alternative or to what. On the other hand, there is a wealth of complex allusions in the name '*Collège Supérieur*'. In everyday speech, the word *collège* means secondary school, from ages 11 to 15, but a capitalized *Collège* refers more archaically to a collegial gathering of peers, and to elite higher education and research institutes such as the *Collège de France* in Paris. The superlative '*supérieur*' doubles down on this educational connotation: as a noun, '*le supérieur*' designates higher education as a whole, and the adjective '*supérieur/e*' is included in the names of the most elite publicly-funded higher education institutes in France, such as the archetypal *École Normale Supérieure*. Our two conference centres are united in their philosophical logos, but divergent in their names: one strongly aligns itself with the elite, national, and therefore secular French education system, while the other asserts its Catholic roots and claims to offer an alternative to *something* – possibly to a long-term and well-established tradition such as the one professed by the former.

Les AlterCathos will be the core ethnographic focus of Part Two of this thesis, but they feature peripherally in this chapter insofar that they are rooted, along with *Le Collège Supérieur*, in a single, expansive network of conference centres run by the intellectual and

educational leaders of the Lyonnais Catholic bourgeoisie. 'Conference-going' is a common practice among what is known as *la cathosphère lyonnaise* – my 'field', a diffuse population definable primarily by its ties to an interlocking grid of private Catholic schools (Caille 2017: 179-181; Association diocésaine de Lyon 2017).

The content of these conferences is advertised as philosophical in style and concerned with topics of 'general culture'. Practically-speaking, *la culture générale* refers to the broad swathes of history, literature, art, popular sciences, and politics which would be included under the umbrella of 'general knowledge' in the English language. But as I will detail below, in the French context *la culture générale* also carries the sociological inferences of 'high culture' along with the political implications of 'national culture' (Durkheim 1895: 126). Inherited from the Humanist perspective on education (Rabelais 1955 [1534]) and reinforced after the Revolution, *la culture générale* is still a key aspect of French education – it is, for instance, the object of specific entrance or final examinations for some higher-education institutions[44] – as well as French public life. 'Cultural' talkshows on television or on radio are as ubiquitous as 'philosophy' magazines and the figure of the public intellectual: if 'general culture' is a content, its usual frame is the particularly French paradigm of philosophy, which refers less to the disciplinary application of logic, metaphysics, or morals (Durkheim 1895: 125) than to the figure of the philosopher as an urbane, free-thinking, academic-*cum*-popular intellectual (Bourdieu 2010 [1984]: 498; Fabiani 2010: 32, 43-90).

Like *La Manif Pour Tous*, explored in Chapter One, conference centres run by Catholic intellectuals and concerned with national 'general culture' cross-cut public and private concerns (Asad 2006b) – they invoke both the secular, Republican conception of 'the nation', and the contested place of French Catholics in its constitution. With reference to the Parisian *Collège des Bernardins*, Elayne Oliphant has argued that French Catholics' conference centres are not 'simply' religious spaces, but are more intricately presented as public spaces of culture and sociality (2015). In this chapter, I will go further to argue that by virtue of their concern for 'general culture' and philosophy, French Catholics' conference centres serve epistemic projects with political implications. I will show that by addressing French 'general culture' as essential knowledge, but knowledge which the state-run National Education

[44] Until June 2013, for instance, *SciencesPo Paris* required prospective students to sit a 'general culture' selection exam.

system fails to fully provide, conferences hosted by conservative, bourgeois Lyonnais lead them to confront what they see as inadequacies in the government's nation-building efforts.

The stakes of this contestation over 'general culture' are hightened in the contemporary public climate of France, which has been marked by a fear of religious communalism (*communautarisme*) since the early-2000s (Bowen 2007). French Catholics had not been the primary target of this national worry – and indeed they still receive less public scrutiny than French Muslims (Fernando 2014) – but their public visibility during *La Manif Pour Tous* in 2013 raised the spectre of putative Catholic 'identitarianism' or 'integralism' (Holmes 2000). The underlying questions – *Do conservative French Catholics think of their Catholicism as a more fundamental identity than their French-ness? Do they imagine themselves to be in any way separate from the Nation?* – are critical in the French Republican context, as Mayanthi Fernando has shown with reference to the 'Muslim French' (2014: 13).

In this chapter, I therefore aim to explore the 'epistemic and social bodies' (Corsín Jiménez & Estalella 2017: 112) which are practically and discursively constituted in the space of Catholic conferences on 'general culture'. I understand the phrase 'epistemic and social bodies' – used by Alberto Corsín Jiménez and Adolfo Estalella to describe the 2011 Occupy movement in Madrid – to index a more complex variation of the analytical theme of 'imagined communities' initially developed by Benedict Anderson to address the rise of nationalism (1983). Like 'imagined communities', 'epistemic and social bodies' are imagined conceptions of (real constructions of) collective identity and belonging; but the phrase itself – '*epistemic* and social' – calls attention to the contingent justifications and arguments which underlie the 'imagination' of these bodies. It also indexes the self-reflexive aspect of this constitution as a community: the Madrilene Occupy protesters described by Corsín Jiménez and Estalella *know* they are forming a new social body, and are aware of its political valence.

In Chapter One, I showed that conservative French Catholics draw in complex ways on symbolic evocations of French 'order' so as to represent themselves as embodiments of the 'real' or 'whole' France. This was already a case of discursive and aspirational construction of the 'epistemic and social body' of conservative French Catholics; imagined to be broadly coterminous with the community of the entire French nation. In this chapter, the intellectual setting of the philosophical conferences renders these constructions even more self-conscious. As I will show below, the conferences are 'prescribed spaces for coming together' (Brown *et al* 2017: 10) which offer a 'window into complexity' (Candea 2007: 179) on my conservative Catholic interlocutors' conceptions of the French Nation, and of themselves as a *cathosphère*.

I will argue that, in the space of the conference centres and over the course of the philosophical conferences, highly-educated bourgeois Catholics both mediate the presence of the *cathosphère* as a 'Catholic' cultural world (Oliphant 2015), and aspirationally claim to defend the 'whole' of 'French culture'. The two endeavours are not seamlessly compatible, as I will show, and Catholic intellectuals must engage with competing interpretations of 'French culture' articulated by the government in the context of its National Education curricula. Overall, I will argue that conservative French Catholics 'square the circle' of their dual cultural aspiration to 'Christian roots' and 'Frenchness' through a unifying discourse of 'rootedness' and 'transmission' – two modes through which they can (continue to) curate the world of French 'high culture'.

A note on structure: This chapter emerges in a traditional French form of academic argument, the *plan dialectique en trois parties* ('dialectical plan in three parts'). This was not a conscious choice while drafting this chapter, and it has not oriented its claims: instead, it is at later stages of editing that it appeared, post-hoc, that the argument held a subjacent dialectical tension. The *plan en trois parties* is well-known to all French high-school and higher education students: a central question, the *problématique*, is addressed by confronting two contraposed stances, the *thèse* (an initial 'thesis' or theory) and the *antithèse*, its seeming opposite. The stages of the *thèse* and *antithèse* progressively reveal the stakes of the initial problem, and contribute elements of resolution even as they show the limits of this overly-categorical binary confrontation. The final stage of the structure is the *synthèse*: by shifting perspectives, this 'synthesis' both answers the original *problématique* and aims to go beyond it. Having once been a French high-schooler myself, I find it hard to escape the *plan en trois parties* – it is ingrained in my analytical outlook, and I usually endeavour to mitigate its influence on my work. In this case, however, there are two reasons which, from an anthropological perspective, prompted me to render this structure apparent after I noticed it lurking in the background of the draft. The first is methodological: our field does not shy away from 'both... and' arguments (Benedict 1946: 2) insofar as they reveal ethnographic complexity. The second reason is, precisely, ethnographic. A defining feature of my fieldwork among highly-educated, bourgeois Lyonnais Catholics was the prevalence of academic debate, intellectual discussion, and argumentative writing in the field, as my interlocutors reflexively thought about their actions in the world, and thought about their thoughts (Foucault 1997: 117; Laidlaw 2014: 102). To the extent that this chapter structure can offer a glimpse into the way that my interlocutors habitually construct their arguments, it is, even if

only allusively, an ethnographic nugget in and of itself within a chapter devoted to French Catholic intellectuals' conferences.

I. *Thèse*: Catholic conferences mediate a particularly Catholic world

I.1 The stakes of 'Christian roots'

There has been a significant rise, since the year 2013, of discussions about Catholicism as an 'identity' (Mayblin *et al* 2017: 18) in the literary publications and quotidian debates held by French Catholics in and beyond my 'field' of the Lyonnais *cathosphère*. Catholic solicitor-turned-journalist Erwan Le Morhedec[45] (2017), a public figure whose editorials are followed closely by my Lyonnais interlocutors, points out that the contemporary focus on Catholicism as an 'identity' contrasts with the internal debates between French Catholics prior to *La Manif Pour Tous*: those focused mainly on whether extreme or fundamentalist Catholic fringes 'count' as Catholic, defining the 'boundaries' of Catholicism by deliberating in theological and faith-centred terms. By contrast, since the controversy over whether *La Manif Pour Tous* could legitimately be labelled 'Catholic' by external commentators in the government and media, Catholic authors and thinkers – and the audiences who follow their work – have had to grapple internally with the question of whether 'Catholic' should be a defining sociocultural identity, and if so, what its core features ought to be (*ibid.*; Cuchet 2018; de Plunkett 2018; Chapter One).

Le Morhedec's own contribution to this debate, largely relayed among my interlocutors, is a warning: in attempting to define the core values and traditions of a singular Catholic 'identity', he fears, segments of the French Catholic population risk veering into 'identitarianism' (*l'identitarisme*), which is the sort of ideological community-building that provokes moral panic on the French public stage – as evidenced by regular outcries over the alleged Muslim *Islamosphère*, or the far-right *fachosphère*. Indeed, a number of books published by Catholic authors[46] during this period question the relationship that Catholics ought to have with France and the Republic.

[45] Not anonymised here.

[46] As mentioned in the Thesis Introduction, many of my Lyonnais interlocutors are published authors and public figures. It is therefore difficult to discuss their work while guaranteeing their anonymity. As a result, I do not

One volume, for example, is illustrated with a church spire topped by a weathervane shaped like a Gallic rooster, and is titled 'French Christians or Christian Frenchmen?'[47] (Polony, Hadjadj & Préaux 2017). Another book, entitled *L'âme de fond* – a pun on 'deep soul' and 'groundswell' (*lame de fond*) – has a starker white cover, with a simple red-white-and-blue ribbon reminiscent of mayors' *tricolore* scarves. The blurb on the back cover, more imperative than truly questioning, asks: 'Are not the stakes, nowadays, to re-enchant the soul of France by awakening its religious subconscience?' (Souchard 2016). By evoking 'our national identity, a soul which owes much to Christianity', this book and many others call upon a longer term debate about the historical and cultural 'Christian roots' of France and Europe.

The question of 'Christian roots' garnered public interest in 2000 when a reference to the 'religious' inheritance of Europe was removed from the draft of the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union[48] under the influence of the French Prime Minister; a move which puzzled Christians throughout Europe and angered a number of French Catholics (Leclerc 23/12/2000; Raison du Cleuziou 2017: 188). At the same time as French politicians were combatting references to 'Christian roots' on the basis of European secular democracy (Kerry 2007), far-right *Identitaires* ('Identitarian') activists within France were employing the same terms to demand immigration control and cultural arbitration on the basis of an alleged ethnocultural French identity (Cahuzac & François 2013: 284; François 2017). In these far-right discourses, the narrative of the 'Christian roots of France' was rarely used to promote Catholicism, but rather served as a way to reject Islam – such as when *Front National* leader Marine Le Pen judged, in 2009, that Islam not only threatened French secularism, but also did not participate, like Judaeo-Christian religions, to the 'identity of France' (Mestre & Monnot

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attempt to clarify here who among the authors cited are close interlocutors, more distant figures in my field, 'second-degree' acquaintances of my own interlocutors, or simply public figures whose work I have heard discussed. However, I do not cite any authors who fall 'further afield' than these four categories – i.e. public figures whose work I have *not* heard explicitly discussed in Lyon.

[47] *Chrétiens français ou français chrétiens*. This interrogation echoes Mayanthi Fernando's reference to her interlocutors as 'Muslim French' – 'women and men committed to practicing Islam as French citizens and to practicing French citizenship as pious Muslims' (2014: 13) – rather than 'French Muslims', a term which indexes a much wider population with significant internal divergences.

[48] Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union, 2000, available online: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

01/12/2009). To my Lyonnais interlocutors across the board, the far-right's narrative was extreme – but equally extreme, to their mind, was the secularized stance taken by French governmental representatives on the European stage, who decried references to European Christianity in favour of neo-Kantian liberal understandings of nation-building, whereby rational commitment to democratic institutions suffices to bind a people (Habermas 1998). What binds a people is more than that, argue all the books published by Catholic authors after *La Manif Pour Tous* – as well as the majority of the conferences addressed in this chapter – and has to do with history, culture, and roots. But they settle on a variety of definitions of what constitutes the 'roots' and the boundaries of the French people; a diversity which is already showcased in the two books mentioned above.

The first book questions whether 'faith should merge with national boundaries' (Polony *et al* 2017) and operates a distinction between the large scale of French 'society' and its internal contingent of 'the faithful', whose primary identities as either 'Christian Frenchmen' or 'French Christians' are debated by its three authors. The book proceeds from a conference held in Paris in late 2016, and is published in the form of a round-table conversation between a journalist, a philosopher, and a priest, who express divergent opinions and do not claim to represent or speak for any wider segments of the French Catholic population. But the second book claims that Christianity is part of the 'soul' of France, and that this dormant religiosity must be re-awakened in order for France to become whole once more (Souchard 2016). This position operates a shift: instead of asking whether and to what extent the history of French and European Christianity forms part of a definable present-day cultural identity – as European lawmakers, Marine Le Pen, and the trio of authors of the first book all asked in their own ways – this volume is centrally concerned with the future, and with the re-christianization of France. Its main objective is a 'christianization of culture', a 'reformulation of social relations, cultural meanings, and personal experience in terms of putatively Christian ideals' (Hefner 1993: 3-4) such as that described in the anthropology of Pentacostal and Evangelical communities across the world (Marshall 2009; Elisha 2011).

But whereas the 'christianization of culture' operated for example in Tennessee by Evangelical megachurches starts with individual moral commitments and progresses through an expanding evangelisation of adjacent communities – 'They all aimed to become better Christians through social outreach, to make other churchgoers better Christians through outreach mobilization, and to spread the gospel by "sharing the love of Christ" with cultural strangers and disadvantaged people' (Elisha 2011: 119) – the call to 're-enchant the soul of

France by awakening its religious subconscience' (Souchard 2016) is more concerned with its in-built national scale than with individual believers. Its call is not so much to become 'better Christians' as 'better Frenchmen'. The place of personal faith in such debates must therefore be questioned rather than taken for granted: even in explicit calls for a 're-christianization' of France, it is never obvious whether 'Christianity' primarily indexes faith or, more widely, a set of social values and cultural references which are seen to be tied to this faith in one way or another (Mayblin *et al* 2017: 18).

The stakes of contemporary discourses about 'Christian roots' held among French Catholics are therefore both 'epistemic' – do they entail a 'christianization' in a spiritual, cultural, and/or discursive sense? – and 'social' (cf. Corsín Jiménez & Estalella 2017): do they concern 'French Catholics' considered as a bounded, separat(ist) 'religious minority' (Favret-Saada 2017) or are they imagined to entail larger scales, such as French society at large?

I.2 Catholic schools and Catholic conference centres

The Catholic conferencing scene in Lyon is an extension of the broader French form of 'conferencing' – the lexicon for these 'prescribed spaces for coming together' (Brown *et al* 2017: 10) is the following. If a 'conference' in English often brings to mind a lengthy event involving several panels or talks, and perhaps lasting several days, *une conférence* in French simply refers to an hour-long or ninety-minute public talk given to an unparticipating audience. A 'conference' may be given by a single individual, or by a panel of representatives from a same association; a 'round table' (*table ronde*) designates a panel of speakers from a variety of provenances; and finally a 'debate' (*débat*) has the same format[49] as a 'round table', but the name forewarns the audience of the more controversial nature of the themes under discussion. The whole genre, including round tables and debates, is most often simply referred to as 'conferences', or the shorthand *conf'*. A 'conference cycle' (*un cycle de conférences*) indicates that several talks, most often spread out over weekly or bi-weekly intervals, are united by a common theme. A 'conference circle' (*un cercle de conférences*) refers not to the talks themselves, but to an organising body which specializes in running such events. Finally, a 'conference centre' (*un centre de conférences*) is not only a place, but also a coordinating team: in this sense, mentions of *Le Collège Supérieur* as a 'conference centre'

[49] The *débats* are a discussion around a given theme; their aim is not to debate in the strictest sense, that is, they do not seek to arbitrate in favour or against a statement or proposition.

can mean either its physical auditorium or its organising committee. *Les AlterCathos*, whose two logos I described above, are more distinctly divided: their café-*cum*-conference locale, *Le Simone*, can only ever be called a 'centre' since this is the only spatial label; while the association who runs the space, i.e. *Les AlterCathos*, can be called a 'circle' or a 'centre' interchangeably.

While I would be hard-pressed to estimate the prevalence of conferencing – beyond academia – in France in general, it is common to find Catholic conference centres administered by lay associations or the dioceses of the largest French cities; indeed, one such centre has already been the object of anthropological scrutiny. Elayne Oliphant describes the 2008 re-opening of the *Collège des Bernardins*, in Paris; a medieval monastery repurposed by the Archdiocese as 'a site devoted to contemporary art exhibitions, intellectual debates and colloquia, a research centre, and a space for a seminary and theology school', where 'mankind is explored in all its dimensions: spiritual, intellectual, and [sensory (*sensible*)]' (2015 : 355). While her work focuses more directly on the art exhibitions, Oliphant recurringly refers to the *Collège*'s offering of 'conferences, debates, or theology lectures' (2015: 362). As the second-largest metropolis and home of one of the most ancient, prestigious, and active Catholic dioceses in France (Gadille *et al* 1983 ; Mas 2007), it is unsurprising that Lyon should, like Paris, possess spaces enabling the intellectual convergence of academics of Catholicism, the clergy, and laypersons. The Lyonnais conference network is, in fact, particularly prominent: it is almost 'unavoidable'. Far from only attracting audiences who specifically go in search of a centre for intellectual debate, it is encountered as a matter of course at key nodes of the wider *cathosphère*, namely its schools.

Private schools hold a crucial position within the Lyonnais *cathosphère* as a meeting place for like-minded families, allowing the cross-fertilisation of after-school children's associations as well as permitting parents to advertise the various organisations they might volunteer in[50]. Overall, private Catholic primary and high schools add up to over 80,000 students in the diocese of Lyon (data from 2011-2012, Lanfrey 2016: 168). Three schools in particular are among the most well-known and successful establishments in the city: *Les Chartreux*, *Les Lazaristes*, and *Sainte-Marie* are all located in the central and well-to-do neighbourhoods (*arrondissements*) of Lyon. *Sainte-Marie* is usually known as '*Les Maristes*', conforming to the pattern of calling schools by the name of the religious congregation which

[50] On Catholic schools' place among bourgeois networks, see also Le Wita (1994: 82-117).

originally founded them – they, along with the fast-growing *Université catholique de Lyon* (*UCLy*, 'Catholic University of Lyon', Moulinet 2016), form the backbone of the network of public conferences discussed here.

Les Chartreux, *Les Lazaristes*, and *Les Maristes*, who are well-known for the high standard of their primary and secondary schooling, share the peculiarity of also offering selective higher education curricula. The *classes préparatoires aux Grandes Écoles*, abbreviated as *CPGE* or *prépas*, are intensive two-year courses after the *Baccalauréat* which, as their name suggests, 'prepare' students for the hugely demanding nationwide contests granting access to the highly selective Masters-track *Grandes Écoles*. These 'Great Schools' have their roots in the 18th and 19th centuries and constitute a parallel, and more prestigious, education system from the national public university; they train researchers, engineers, business executives, magistrates, civil servants, or public administrators (Bourdieu 1996 [1989]: 133-135; Power 17/09/2003). The conferences hosted in the evenings or weekends by *Les Maristes* or *l'Université catholique de Lyon* (*UCLy*) are therefore open to the general public, but with the tacit understanding that they are calibrated to be even more intellectually stimulating than the already high-intensity environment of the courses followed by students or the research environment of the University. The topics under discussion here are, as in Elayne Oliphant's ethnography of the Parisian *Collège des Bernardins*, exclusively 'high culture' (2015: 354) and geared at an 'elite public' (*ibid*. 368; Bourdieu 2010 [1984]).

The schools and *l'UCLy* possess several essential elements for the organisation of successful conferences: large auditoriums, 'in-built' advertising targets – students and their families –, and therefore reliable audiences. Professors from each school are in charge of organising their respective establishment's conference cycles, and because they are top-tier academics in their own right, they are also regularly invited to contribute to the other circles as speakers or respondants. This lineup is occasionally complemented by notable speakers attracted from across the region and the country by the schools' and conference centres' cultural capital. Rather than competing against one another, the diverse conference organisers distribute each others' yearly programmes and leaflets, occasionally co-host events, or rent their auditoriums to one another, resulting in an overwhelming impression, at the structural level, of cooperation and collaboration. In 1999, Gérard Leval[51], a philosophy professor at *Sainte-Marie,* opened an external conference centre, separate from the school but with its

[51] 'Gérard Leval' is a public thinker but has been anonymised because I do not discuss his published work here.

financial support, as well as that of the diocese's cultural fund, the *Fondation Saint-Irénée*. This conference centre, *Le Collège Supérieur*, is now a critical node in the *cathosphère*'s intellectual and cultural scene; it is run by a team of twenty experts in philosophy, several of whom are also theologians, historians, economists, or have experience in business, medicine, and the law. While national and international personalities are invited for one-off 'special encounters' (*rencontre spéciale*) – most notably during my fieldwork, theologian William Cavanaugh was flown in from Chicago to discuss 'eucharistic anarchism' – the bulk of the conferences is given by *Le Collège Supérieur*'s local team, whose collective expertise is indubitable. The vast majority of this team are volunteers or receive little remuneration for their participation in these events. They are, for the most part, employed as professors at *Sainte-Marie* – although nominally the conference centre is now independent from *Les Maristes* – or other elite schools, or as researchers at *UCLy*.

Les Alternatives Catholiques, who will feature more prominently in Part Two, are entwined in the same network: most the founders were once students at *Sainte-Marie*; most met during their literary *classe préparatoire* but a few had already been pupils there throughout high school. During the *prépa*, they were taught philosophy by Gérard Leval, and they attended Leval's conferences at *Le Collège Supérieur* both before, and during, the creation of their own association, which occurred in the later years of their Master's degree at the *École Normale Supérieure de Lyon*. Their immersion in these existing spheres of intellectual conversation, vouched for by Leval, was essential not only in 2011 when they set up *Les AlterCathos*, but also in 2015-2016, while fundraising in the build-up to opening their café/conference space *Le Simone*. *Les AlterCathos* are built on the same economic foundations as the other centres: they secured an initial monetary donation from the *Fondation Saint-Irénée*, the cultural fund of the diocese, as well as a donation by *Le Collège Supérieur* itself – their conferences are now run through audience subscriptions [52]. Consequently, while *Les AlterCathos*'s conferences are technically independent from the Catholic private-school system, they rely on the same 'Cathosphere' network. During my fieldwork in 2017, the directing team were now in their late-twenties: most were employed as philosophy, literature, theology, or classics

[52] For comparison, *Le Collège Supérieur*, which boasts a very dense conference schedule, offers 50€ passes for 6 conferences, reduced to 25€ for students, or a 120€ unlimited yearly pass (60€ for students). *Les AlterCathos*, who are not yet as established within this network, are more obvious in their attempts to prod new members into regular attendance: in 2017-2018, a single conference cost 10€, or 5€ for students, pensioners, and the unemployed, but a year-long unlimited subscription only cost 35€, or 25€ according to the same criteria.

teachers in and around Lyon, and were not remunerated for their 'extra-curricular' commitment to the conference centre. In fact, one of the founders of *Les AlterCathos* was, by then, also part of the team of volunteer experts who provide conferences for *Le Collège Supérieur*; closing the loop in this singular, powerful, and intrinsically education-related network – or 'social body' – of Catholic conference centres.

I.3 Philosophy and 'general culture' among Catholic audiences

While I cannot say whether the same connection also exists in Paris, it is important to understand, in Lyon, why the conferences proliferated so specifically around the network of private Catholic schools. Initially, the conferences aimed only to benefit the schools' pupils, and were part of their preparation for a number of nationwide exams requiring excellent essay-writing skills in literary disciplines. One of the peculiarities of the French high-school system is that all students, including those specialising in scientific disciplines, must study philosophy during their final year. Consequently, even students who have elected to reduce their focus on literature or history must be proficient in the overall 'general culture' (*culture générale*) necessary to sit the philosophy exam of the *Baccalauréat*, which lasts 4 hours and is devoted to a single long essay (*dissertation*; Fabiani 2010: 31-32). While the '*Bac de Philo*' is something of a rite of passage (*ibid*.), it pales in comparison to the 6- or 7-hours-long essay-based philosophy exams the same pupils might encounter in subsequent years in elite higher education courses.

Philosophy exams, or the *culture générale* exams still present in the entrance selection of certain *Grandes Écoles*, rely on notoriously terse prompts – in the years leading up to my fieldwork, schools had variously required students to discuss, in 7 hours, topics such as 'norms', 'the search for truth', 'inhabiting the world', or 'language and reality'. Such exams therefore test not only the scope of students' knowledge, but primarily their ability to produce remarquable arguments about the intellectual stakes of the topic, and novel resolutions for these stakes.

Geared towards high-school, undergraduate, or *prépa*-level students preparing philosophy or *culture générale* exams, evening and weekend conferences run by schools or *Le Collège Supérieur* therefore aim to give students an edge; not by imparting knowledge – the province of daytime classes – but by offering new angles of approach to possible essay prompts. This is

often done through the lens of 'religious culture'[53]. For example, I attended a conference run by *Le Collège Supérieur* and hosted in the auditorium of *Les Chartreux* for the sake of their *prépa* students, on the theme of *la parole*, or speech. A good essay on 'speech', the speaker explained, would discuss the notion of performative speech, which turns words into action (Austin 1962); a great essay would go further, and consider the Christian '*Parole*' with an uppercase P – the Word of God, also called *le Verbe*, 'the verb', one of the names for Jesus – the notion of divinity sublimated into speech, and word turned into flesh. Leading the audience in reading the Prologue to Saint John's Gospel, the speaker admonished us that 'the Bible is an indispensable reference in *culture générale*, whatever the syllabus may say'. His comment was meant as a strategic suggestion: the *Grandes Écoles* selections are contest-based and ranked, so he encouraged his audience to capitalise on the fact that competing students elsewhere might not be well-versed in the 'indispensable' Christian references in *culture générale* – by practicing their ability to think nimbly with such references, his own students had greater chances of turning in stand-out scripts.

Such conferences are not explicitly aimed at – even less reserved to – Catholics. Nevertheless, the most obvious giveaway of the fact that the audience of such conferences is, indeed, largely Catholic is the high number of young men and women wearing engraved gold baptism medals (*médailles de baptême*) featuring the Virgin Mary or infant Jesus. Those are gifted to newly-baptised children by their godparents, and are more reflective of those kin ties than of personal faith. Simple crosses or medallions dedicated to patron saints, or bearing the sigil of monastic congregations one might visit on a retreat, while less prevalent, signal faith and practice more clearly. Another indicator of the audience's belonging to the traditional Catholic bourgeoisie is their fairly homogeneous clothing style, referred to as '*BCBG*' – an abbreviation of *bon chic bon genre*, or 'the right chic and the right style', a definition which in itself highlights a distinction of 'those who know from those who do not' (Hantoux 1985; in Le Wita 1994: 85n). More concretely, a *BCBG* style is supposed to balance discretion with sophistication; high-quality woollens and cottons in neutral colours abound, perhaps spruced up by a weave or pattern. Men of all ages wear slacks, button-up shirts, crew-neck jumpers; jeans, t-shirts or hoodies are the exception rather than the rule. Women wear dresses, skirts, and slacks; mainly in pastel or dark tones but occasionally more colourful: although they

[53] The Diocesan Direction of Catholic Schooling, or DDEC (*Direction diocésaine de l'enseignement catholique*) had notably inscribed 'the attention to the religious dimension of culture' into its list of priorities during the 'Horizon 2020' congress held from 2000-2007 (Lanfrey 2016: 181, my translation).

never wear high-street logos, they do wear blouses and cardigans in vivid colours, or add the personal touch of a printed silk scarf worn at the throat, as a headband, or occasionally as a belt. The same attention to balance guides their attitude towards cosmetics and jewellery: discreet makeup is offset by large earrings, which may be precious heirlooms or instead colourful feathers and brassy metal alloy, the one concession made to current mainstream fashion.

It was once pointed out to me that the 'most Catholic girls' (*les filles les plus catho*) are those wearing clip-on earrings, to avoid body modifications – this rejoins the widespread preference for nude makeup, *au naturel*, which is intended to look as though none is worn at all. But the interlocutor who drew my attention to the absence of body modifications, although a practicing – and clip-on earring'ed – Catholic herself, shrugged it off as 'probably an Old Testament thing, and definitly an old-fashioned thing'[54]. The Old Testament does indeed include the quote: 'You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord' (Leviticus 19: 28). But my interlocutor's nonchalant reference to this Old Testament prescription, and comparatively assertive mention of 'old-fashioned' traditionalism, suggests that her initial appraisal of clip-on earrings as signalling 'the most Catholic girls' requires unpacking. Over time, it became clear that her characterisation of the clip-on earrings as an 'old-fashioned thing' was accurate: they were worn by women of all ages from particularly traditionalist families – a minority often correlated with the old aristocracy – rather than by women whom I knew to be very devout, but who belonged to other subsets of the wider conservative Catholic bourgeoisie. Clip-on earrings do not index personal piety[55], then – and neither do they index genuine reflexive literalism in the application of Biblical imperatives (Harding 2001). As far as the interpretation of 'religious signs' go, therefore, the rejection of ear-piercings signify a social class – heirloom clip-ons can be remarkably elaborate pieces of jewellery with precious metals and stones – and a traditional cultural milieu (Le Wita 1994: 58-59, 62-68) more than a personal commitment to faith. Nonetheless, the recognisable fashion of the traditional middle-

[54] '*Probablement un truc de l'Ancien Testament, et en tous cas carrément vieux-jeu*'. The avoidance of body modifications was never explicitly linked, by my interlocutors, to the defense of 'natural' humanity during *La Manif Pour Tous* (Chapter One) and the development of *écologie humaine* or *écologie intégrale* (Chapters Three *ff.*).

[55] Elsewhere in the world, piety may be expressed *through* body modifications: e.g. votive tattoos of saints and Catholic objects among Italian-American men in Brooklyn (Maldonado-Estrada 2020).

to upper-classes are often held as a 'sign' of Catholicism in France, as Chapter One has explored.

In general, the conferences exude a studious atmosphere; *Le Collège Supérieur*'s auditorium, in particular, is excessively classroom-like. It is a white box, wider than it is deep, with only a narrow band of clerestory windows at the very top of one of the walls; as soon as dusk falls, the room feels enclosed in a neon glare – the whole room is lit, rather than just the stage, in order to allow the audience to take notes. There is a raised dais at the front of the room, concrete painted white, with a table awaiting the speaker; the rest of the room is arranged in long rows of black metal desks and chairs bolted to one another and the floor, with two aisles cutting through. Since the conferences are open to all paying members of the public, the audience is clearly split into two – the majority are higher-education students, who lay out pens, writing paper, and audio recorders on their tables before the speaker arrives, and who spend the duration of the talk frantically scribbling; but there are always also a number of middle-aged couples, who walk in leisurely, arm-in-arm, well-dressed in understated trench coats or barbours[56]. For the students, developing one's *culture générale* is a matter of academic necessity in order to stand out in examinations; for the older generation, whose children are grown and whose evenings are freed, 'general culture' or 'the exploration of the philosophical stakes of' a theme at hand, as *Le Collège Supérieur* advertises on its website, are a regular indulgence for the benefit of one's own intellectual stimulation – and perhaps a nostalgic reminder of their own past as *prépa* students.

We therefore come to the end of the first 'third' of our *plan en trois parties*, or essay plan 'in three parts'. Based on the overarching structural and social homogeneity of the Catholic conference centres in Lyon, it seems possible to advance a *thèse* – a first argumentative stance – tentatively suggesting that the Lyonnais *cathosphère* is a bounded 'social body' attempting to 're-christianize' 'culture' (cf. Elisha 2011). On the face of it, the conferences hold both an 'inner cultural logic' (2000: 3) and 'praxis of belonging' (Borneman 1992: 339n, in *ibid*.), two of the characteristics listed by Douglas Holmes regarding 'integralist' separatism in Europe. But a good *plan en trois parties* acknowledges, by the end of the first part, that this provisionary *thèse* has largely been established by collecting 'surface data' – it is based on *doxa*, 'what seems to appear', and must yet be complemented with more rigorous *episteme*.

[56] *Au naturel* style is reinforced in these middle-aged and elderly women's hairstyles: they may be permed, but greying hair may only be dyed as long as this is unobtrusive and not a noticeably 'unnatural' shade.

The end of the first part therefore always relies on a transition: a new direction for the investigation of the following part, which will complicate the analytical picture.

If conference-going is a recognised and regular practice among certain classes of Catholics across France, for the Lyonnais an essential element of the 'social body' of conference-goers is the presence of students. It intrinsically positions audience members at the intersection of narratives surrounding education and culture, crosscut by the respective requirements of the Republican school system and of the Catholic private schools applying – and exceeding – the official curricula. Elayne Oliphant has previously suggested that a Paris-based Catholic conference centre, *Le Collège des Bernardins*, is an ideal locus for anthropological explorations of notions of national French culture: its curators produce secularising narratives which recast the architecture and art of the Catholic Church as latent elements of the wider cultural and intellectual projects which drove the historical development of secular Paris[57] (2015: 353). Here, the exploration of national cultural narratives gains another strand of complexity: in addition to the contested binary between religious and secular culture present in Oliphant's Parisian case-study, Lyonnais conference centres draw in the third factor of education. Indeed, the role of the National Education system in the epistemic and social construction of the French nation has been the focus of much anthropological discussion since the last quarter of the 20th century.

II. *Antithèse*: Catholic conferences articulate a 'whole' 'French culture'

II.1 The stakes of Republican education

Education, according to the French Republican ideal, is a matter for the State, more so than a familial concern; indeed, the role of the school is to extirpate children from the particularisms learnt at home, in order to provide them with a collective, and homogeneous, citizen's

[57] The political and media responses to the fire at *Notre-Dame de Paris* Cathedral on April 15th, 2019 reflect this ambiguity – for some, *Notre-Dame* is primarily a religious site, while for others it is a symbol of the French nation and of its claims to worldwide influence in secular cultural, literary, philosophical and political spheres. This dichotomy returns to the question of the place of the Catholic religion within the construction of the French nation: see Elkaïm (26/07/2018) for a chronological recapitulation of the interactions between the successive political forms of the French State with *Notre-Dame*, or Prazel (26/04/2019) for a far more partisan account of the 'erasure' of Catholic believers from the governmental responses to the 2019 fire.

education (Reed-Danahay 1996: 2-3; Bowen 2007: 11-13). In this perspective, the school is understood as a unique locus where regional – and, from the late 19th century onward, religious – differences are expunged, turning 'peasants into Frenchmen' (Weber 1976; Hobsbawm 1992 [1983]; Green 1990). One essential stage in the development of this Republican vision of national education was the secularization of primary schooling, entrusted to Republican schoolteachers (J.Ozouf 1967) by the *Loi Ferry*, or 'Ferry law', named after the Education Minister who proposed it, wresting control away from the Catholic clergy in the early 1880s (Stock-Morton 1988; Reed-Danahay 1996: 110). This ban from primary schools was later compounded by 1904 laws forbidding the clergy from teaching at all – including at secondary level – in the public school system, confining religious teachers to the diminishing private sector (*ibid*. 127). Further stages in the drawn-out contest between State and Church over education include the *Loi Debré* of 1959, wherein the State conceded that private – mainly Catholic – schools would receive government aid if they adhered to a number of guidelines and regulations; and the *Loi Savary* of 1984, which proposed to dismantle the private school system altogether but was ultimately aborted due to the 'giant' 'free school' demonstration mentioned in Chapter One.

The stakes of the second part of our *plan en trois parties* therefore emerge: it is not possible to explore the internal articulations of Lyonnais Catholic conference centres 'in a vacuum' from the broader articulations of French Republican education, which in turn defines French citizenship and the Nation. To what extent do the 'social and epistemic bodies' of the *cathosphère* and of the Republican Nation intersect, coincide, or reject one another?

Today, the prominence and excellence of Catholic schools are broadly accepted features in Lyon (Lanfrey 2016), and do not any longer provoke the fervent ideological divisions between secular 'reds' and religious 'white' partisans of 'free schools', described in the second half of the 20th century in regional strongholds of Catholicism such as Brittany (McDonald 1989). However, the age-old conflict between State and Church in education is but one aspect of the wider issues sapping the foundations of the 'mythology of the Third Republic' in which 'the school, free, secular and compulsory, is a neutral space offered to all, to guarantee an equal start and meritocratic justice among citizens' (Bellamy 2014: 85), and which the conferences discussed here must necessarily face when they address 'general culture'.

Indeed, although the *Éducation Nationale* is meant to productively link French language, culture, and civism together in order not only to educate children but also to turn them into an

equal, unified nation of citizens (M.Ozouf 1985), this has been challenged by social scientists as an 'officializing' discourse (Bourdieu 1977 [1972]: 40) rather than an actual success. In *The Inheritors* (1964), Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron highlighted the French school system's intrinsic reliance on elite culture, its favouring of students from upper-class backgrounds with prior mastery of the codes of this culture – the 'inheritors' designated by the title – and, overall, the school system's perpetuation of social hierarchies. By 1970, in *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture,* Bourdieu and Passeron had given up on their earlier hopes for a reformed multicultural and relativist education system, concluding that 'pedagogic authority will remain based on the arbitrary imposition of certain preferences, and the resulting exclusions' (Bellamy 2014: 101). Through this cultural arbitration, they argued, the school system maintains a monopoly on legitimate symbolic violence, and intrinsically betrays its own goal of equality (*ibid*. 104). The impact of Bourdieu's work has since resulted in greater concern among educational institutions about the place of 'culture' in determining the bounds of 'French identities', and more crucially about the responsibility of the State in the construction of these identities among new generations of Republican citizens.

II.2 A Catholic defense of 'general culture'

Prominent philosophers and *classes préparatoires* professors across France – including many from the most elite private schools, which are often Catholic – have protested against the French State's newfound tentativeness in matters of cultural education, which they termed the 'death of transmission' (*ibid*.). Reflecting on his own experience as a young professor in Versailles, Catholic philosopher François-Xavier Bellamy – a regular guest speaker in *Le Collège Supérieur* – considers that the Ministry of National Education placed teachers in a paradoxical position:

> ... we became in our own eyes the accomplices of social inequality. By giving classes, we reproduced the false legitimacy of relationships of domination. By transmitting knowledge, we imposed a *habitus*. [...] An example among many others, witnessed during my first year as a teacher: in December 2009, during the polemics around the entrance contest to the *Grandes Écoles*, a Minister for Higher Education declared, in an official bulletin, that general culture (*la culture générale*) was 'discriminatory'. (Bellamy 2014: 105-106)

Polemics around 'general culture' have flared up regularly in the past decade and given rise to two paradoxical situations: on the one hand, the Ministry of Education, which is historically

meant to integrate children into the French nation through the propagation of a shared culture, is now partly staffed by civil servants who view this project as intrinsically flawed and discriminatory. On the other hand, Catholic professors from the private school system find themselves defending the public Republican ideal – the very school from which they had been so systematically cast out in the Third Republic – against Bourdieusian radical sociology. Continued references to 'general culture' in private schools' and *Le Collège Supérieur*'s conferences during my fieldwork in 2017 therefore went against the grain of the Ministry of Education itself, which had been attempting to limit the use of the notion and exerting pressure against higher education institutes to abolish the 'general culture' section from their entrance exams. References to *la culture générale* in Lyon are therefore not the result of passively following a national curriculum, but instead are the wilful choice to continue to posit a necessary cultural content which French students – and citizens – must acquire.

This content is extremely wide-ranging: for example, in 2017, one conference centre alone offered a cycle of 8 conferences on philosophers' conceptions of God (including Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Kant, Leibniz, Hegel, Heidegger, and more); a cycle on the stakes of artificial intelligence; a cycle on 'identity' (in 4 conferences, relating it to gender, adolescence, memory, and personality troubles); a cycle on law in a globalised world; two cycles on European history and economic crises; and a cycle on 'servitude and submission' in literary works from Montesquieu to Ibsen, among others. Above, I cited a conference speaker who insisted that 'the Bible is an indispensable reference in general culture, whatever the syllabus may say' – this short anecdote highlights two critiques of the *Éducation Nationale*'s approach to cultural education which I have found to be prevalent among the Catholic populations of Lyon; namely, that it generally underplays the 'full' scope of French culture and must be supplemented in one's own time, and moreover that it deliberately downplays the cultural significance of Christianity.

In this sense, while highly-educated Lyonnais Catholics consider themselves to be among the victims of the *Éducation Nationale*'s symbolic violence, they also signal that *all* French schoolchildren are being stripped of one facet of the 'general culture' they are all entitled to. The long conference cycle about the place of God in major philosophers' work, mentioned above, bears witness to the underlying sentiment that key elements of interest to all students of philosophy, history, or literature, are at best insufficiently covered by the official curriculum, and at worst deliberately downplayed due to their religious character. For the conference speakers of *Le Collège Supérieur* and the Catholic schools, it is indisputable that

the historical, literary, and philosophical contributions of Christianity are intrinsic to 'general culture', and that the Ministry is at fault for promoting an overly-secularised, and therefore incomplete, syllabus.

This is never dwellt on at length; rather, conferences dealing with religious material may include a brief acknowledgment that this is 'not on the syllabus' (*hors-programme*), simultaneously reinforcing the notion that it is nevertheless essential content for 'general culture' and suggesting that its exclusion from the nationwide *programme* is an intentional, partisan decision. If such decisions are partisan, in turn, they are considered to be temporary: while the Lyonnais Catholic networks denigrate the Ministry of Education's choices of curriculum or syllabus, they nevertheless defend the long-term prestige of the *Grandes Écoles* entrance contests – which most of the conference organisers have sat – by holding them to 'better' or 'truer' high standards than those of the contests' governmental examiners.

Despite their explicit stance as a last line of defense against the 'death of transmission' (Bellamy 2014: 104) and their implicit reintroduction of Catholic elements into 'general culture', the Lyonnais conference networks never go so far as to argue explicitly that Catholicism forms the 'roots' of 'Western culture and civilization' – an otherwise relatively common narrative across Europe, shared prominently by Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of the reopening of the Parisian *Collège des Bernardins* in 2008 (Oliphant 2015: 369). Nevertheless, they do suggest that the cultural influence of Catholicism weaves one tradition among others, which, for the sake of all French citizens' mastery of their own national heritage, should not be uprooted lightly. In this sense, just like *Les Bernardins*'s art exhibitions, they defend the vision of 'an irrefutable cultural and public (i.e. not just religious and, therefore, private) space for Catholicism in the French public sphere' (*ibid.*) – a place which is not sufficient to ground *all* of 'general culture', but which is at least necessary to complete an elite education and obtain the qualifications of national administrators and civil servants (Bourdieu 1996 [1989]: 133-135; Power 17/09/2003).

II.3 Equivocal 'epistemic and social bodies'

In a recent special issue of *JRAI* on 'meetings' (Brown, Reed, and Yarrow 2017), Alberto Corsín Jiménez and Adolfo Estalella argue that 'novel epistemic and social bodies' may be produced during certains kinds of meetings, for example the Madrid street assemblies of 2011-2012. For Corsín Jiménez and Estalella, the political weight of the street protest and the

'epistemic credibility' (*ibid*. 117) of the specific themes of the 15M/Occupy movement relied upon the gathering of undifferentiated 'witnesses'. It is through the experimental format of the street meetings, involving very lengthy and tiresome discussions, they argue, that pre-existing political forms were exhausted and the assembled participants recast as a community of *vecinos*, 'neighbours' (2017: 120-121).

Corsín Jiménez and Estalella's focus was on the assemblies *per se* rather than on the participants' diverse backgrounds – but they point out that in other contexts of developing assemblies, political or otherwise, the background of participants may be critical to establishing a similar epistemic credibility. They refer, in particular, to the early-modern emergence and articulation of scientific 'societies of experiment' in seventeenth-century England (Shapin & Schaffer 1985; Shapin 1996; Strathern 2014: 11). In this case, the specific social background of members served as a warranty of the trustworthiness of the emerging body: it was upon the character of the virtuous 'gentleman', free from economic stress or personal bias, that the social reputation and the epistemic validation of the 'house of experiments' rested (Shapin 1988; 1994).

Corsín Jiménez and Estalella's work draws attention not only to the explicit aims of meetings, but also to the extent to which the background and particularities of participants may 'count' or not in the proper unfolding of a meeting and the achievement of its aims. If the street assemblies of *vecinos* in Madrid can be analysed as a form of meeting which both creates an ontological body and gives it a political force (*ibid*. 117), then the classic vision of the Republican schoolroom (and, in Chapter One, 'the street' during *manifestations*) is a similar locus which in theory performs the ontological and political construction of the French nation (M.Ozouf 1985). Like the Madrid assemblies, the success of the Republican schoolroom is predicated upon the 'undifferentiation' of its participants: the pupils must shed their home-grown regional and religious particularisms, much as the Madrid *vecinos'* extreme boredom and exhaustion wiped away their individual particularisms and created an equal political footing.

But theory and practice may yield different results. If, in abstract terms, Lyonnais conference centres' insistance on *culture générale* indexes an integrating and equalizing 'epistemic and social body' on the scale of the Nation, in practice, the backgrounds of participants take on a greater relevance when they set themselves up as 'defenders' against the 'death of transmission' (Bellamy 2014: 104). By denouncing the disappearance of a 'cultural logic' (Holmes 2000: 3) at the national level, vocal professors – often from well-to-do

backgrounds and affiliated to private Catholic schools – implicitly suggest that this cultural logic nevertheless still exists *somewhere*, and they are partaking in it themselves. Against the backdrop of the Nation, patchy spaces where transmission is 'not dead' appear like a negative image. In this light, the conferences start to resemble the seventeenth-century 'houses of experiment' populated by hand-picked 'gentlemen' (Shapin 1988) rather more than the Madrid street assemblies with their undifferentiated 'neighbours'.

By this point in the ethnographic investigation – and the originally-unintended but apt *plan en trois parties* – we have brought to light complexities which had remained hidden in the first instance. These serve to course-correct some flawed initial assumptions: crucially, the Lyonnais Catholic conference centres' positioning *vis-à-vis* the 'general culture' of the Nation establishes that they are neither separatist communalists (*communautaristes*, Bowen 2007), nor that they are integralist 'identitarians' (Holmes 2000). Indeed, they consider that their defense of *culture générale* serves an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) beyond the small and culturally-homogeneous scale of the Lyonnais *cathosphère*: it is oriented towards the scale of the nation-state. In turn, this engagement with the scale of the secular Republic suggests that a Catholic 'identity' is not considered to be a *sine qua non* condition of engagement with the 'cultural logic' at hand (Holmes 2000: 3).

However, the explorations conducted here, for all that they were initially framed as an 'opposition to' or a 'departure from' the first part, ultimately confirm and entrench some of its initial assessments. The ethnographic observation of the socio-cultural homogeneity of conference audiences has not been destabilised by any of the new material put forward – on the contrary, it has been solidified through the lens of Bourdieu and Passeron's concept of cultural 'inheritors' (1964; 1970). The 'epistemic and social bodies' constructed in the space of the *culture générale* conferences therefore not only entail negotiations on religious, political, and cultural grounds, but also crucially in terms of '*being élite*' – the conferences are 'meetings' (Brown et al 2017) which rely on this particular aspect of their audiences' background for epistemic and social credibility (Shapin 1988).

This is confirmed in a roundabout manner by the decoration of *Le Collège Supérieur*. The white-walled auditorium and smaller entrance hall are bare but for a series of black-and-white photographic portraits. None are labelled, and the reason for the selection is left to the spectator's guess. I could only name a few: philosopher and author Albert Camus, recognizable by his trench-coat and cigarette; historian and philosopher of social sciences René Girard, with his distinctive eyebrows; and the bowl-cut and straggly beard of Russian

novelist, philosopher, and political thinker Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. The latter's inclusion suggested the selection was based neither on Frenchness, nor on Catholicism. After Googling cross-references between these three familiar faces, it appeared that the selection was a compilation of Nobels Prizewinners in Literature and members of the *Académie Française*. In prompting this 'homework' about the most elite accolades a French writer and thinker can aspire to, the selection of portraits was therefore a case in point of *Le Collège Supérieur*'s continuous promotion of a vision, not only of 'French culture', but of French intellectual *excellence*.

In short, the narrative of *culture générale* sustained in the Lyonnais Catholic conference centres elicits the imagination of epistemic and social bodies which prove to be 'equivocal': that is, which 'hold at the same time views that are so divergent as to verge on self-contradiction' (Holbraad 2014:382 in Heywood 2015: 865). They are simultaneously Catholic and Republican, and geared towards universal integration into the Nation while being elite. These internal contradictions appear at times and disappear at others, but are particularly evoked on the occasion of disagreements with the Ministry of National Education – whether these disagreements take place on the national public stage, or in conference speakers' casual caveats that something is *hors-programme*, 'not on the curriculum'.

III. *Synthèse*: Catholic conferences curate 'transmission' and 'rootedness'

III.1 Familiar content rather than new

It is 9.30pm on a Wednesday night in October 2017, and a talk about philosopher Simone Weil's conception of labour has just ended; it is the third and final installment in a series of weekly talks hosted by *Les Alternatives Catholiques*[58] on 'work' (*le travail*). The theme of 'work' fits perfectly within the tradition of 'general culture' conferences – a single, terse prompt, which can be grasped in a multitude of ways by a well-read and intellectually-agile student. Likewise, the speaker for the evening, a philosopher and well-known expert on Simone Weil's work, is a typical participant in the Catholic conference network; in fact, he is the Dean of the Catholic University of Lyon (*UCLy*). The conference takes place in *Les*

[58] I will explore in the next chapter the relationship between *Les AlterCathos* and the rest of the cathosphère. For the purposes of this chapter, what matters is the shared format of their conferences.

AlterCathos's café-*cum*-conference space, named *Le Simone* in homage to Weil, and which is located just a street away from *l'UCLy* – in the daytime, *UCLy* students and teachers drop by the café for lunch and a coffee, and they return in the evenings for conferences.

I am sitting against the wall, at the very end of a row of chairs, and will have to wait for the chairs' occupants to exit from the other side before I can follow them away. My direct neighbours, two women in their late-sixties or seventies, stay seated rather than joining in the general shuffle, and turn to address me. '*Vous êtes coinçée*,' one of them points out, 'you are stuck'. Far from innocuous, these three words frame the bounds of any upcoming interaction with my elderly, patrician neighbours – they are, on her part, an initial performance of our respective social positions. I am younger, they are my elders; I am alone, they are two; by addressing me first, she implicitly authorises me to engage with them – but this is not a *conversation*, or she would have led with 'good evening'. The wording is equally revealing. It is both a polite acknowledgment of the situation that the three of us find ourselves in – polite in the use of the formal '*vous*' rather than '*tu*' despite our age difference – and a skillful evasion of any form of apology for the woman's own role in rendering me 'stuck', *coinçée,* a colloquial term which minimises my predicament. I can have only one response – '*non non, je vous en prie'*, or roughly 'not at all, you're welcome' – to complete the scene-setting she initiated. From now on, it is implicitly agreed that I would be the one bothering them, rather than the other way around, if I were to attempt to leave my seat by navigating around their knees. Elegantly and implacably, they have handled the situation to their advantage, showcasing the politeness, poise, and privilege ingrained in high-society ladies of a certain age.

Resigned to my fate, I observe the post-conference ballet taking place around us while I remain 'stuck'. Because these evening events take place in what is normally a café, as soon as the speaker has finished, the organisers busy themselves stacking the chairs – roughly aligned in six shaky rows of seven or eight white plastic seats – in order to clear the space for audience members to mingle awhile. My two neighbours keep track of the chair-stacking process – '*Les jeunes*, the young people, will come and free us', one notes with satisfaction. As I help my neighbours collect their walking canes, stashed underneath their chairs for the duration of the talk, I take the liberty of asking them if this was their first visit to *Le Simone*, which had opened eighteen months earlier.

They reply in the affirmative, the first one saying that they came 'on a whim' tonight, and the other elaborating further: 'We had no plans for the evening, so Marguerite suggested that

we might as well "have ourselves a little conference"'. The turn of her phrase – *on n'a qu'à se faire une petite conf*' – is informal in the extreme. Replacing the word *conférence* by the shorter *conf'*, she broadcasts an easy familiarity with such a setting, further explaining that Marguerite[59] and herself had browsed through the paper programmes of a few conference series, and selected this talk on Simone Weil, whose work they were both well acquainted with. 'You had *Les AlterCathos*'s yearly programme at home?', I repeat, but Marguerite's companion – her sister or longtime friend, I assume – cannot remember where she collected the leaflet; it may have been 'at Church', 'at another *conf*' somewhere', or maybe one of her sons dropped it off. Regardless, this year's programme has only been released since late-August; it has made its way into her reference pile of leaflets within two months.

Marguerite and her sister/friend are rather typical of *cathosphère* conference-goers. Their description of the whimsical impulse which had led them to spontaneously attend an evening talk – '*on va se faire une petite conf*'', 'we'll "have ourselves" a little *conf*'' – uses colloquial language framing conference-going as a consumption, a one-off, short-term binge of what is 'being had'. It is also vulgar and predatory language, associated with mobs or bullies who identify a victim to 'have themselves', and master it to the point of destruction. In other words, the two women knew in advance exactly what they were going to be 'having themselves'. In the short conversation they had with me on this occasion, they found it important to mention that they had chosen this conference on 'Labour (*le travail*) according to Simone Weil' because they had both read Weil already, and attended other talks given by the Dean of the Catholic University. They chose the conference based on the expectation of familiar content, rather than new.

III.2 The philosophical method against 'postmodern derision'

Marguerite and her sister/friend's voracious attitude towards cultural content they *already know* brings into relief an implicit but key feature of the wider network of school-affiliated 'general culture' conferences – one which has not yet been a point of direct focus. When these

[59] I continue to refer to 'Marguerite' with her (anonymised) first name because she was not formally introduced during this first meeting – otherwise, the polite form of address would have been '*Madame* + Family name'. In fact, it was surprising for Marguerite's companion to refer to her so casually in front of a stranger. It denoted intimacy between the two women, who, if they had been more distant acquaintances, would have designated one another as '*Madame* Something-or-Other' when telling *me* about each other.

conferences claim that they aim to give students an edge in nationwide examinations by investigating 'the philosophical stakes'[60] of an event, a text, a belief or notion, it is expected that the audience already knows, at least passably, about the topic at hand. To return to the conference topics mentioned earlier: it is only because the audience already knows Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Pascal, etc, that a conference cycle can compare their conceptions of God. It is only because the audience is already familiar with the literary works of Montesquieu, La Boëtie, and Ibsen, that a conference cycle can address themes of 'servitude and submission' in their work. It is only because the audience knows both Austin's notion of 'performative speech' and the biblical incarnation of the 'Word' of God, that a conference can tie them into a discussion of the agency and materiality of *la parole*.

In other words, the audience does not attend philosophical conferences in order to *gain* 'general culture', but must already possess it, as Bourdieu and Passeron argued (1964): the practice of philosophy, in France, necessitates conceptual and factual bases (*les bases*) and at the very least a strong grasp of the history of ideas (Fabiani 2010: 25). What the conferences operate is a sublimation of compiled elements of culture into a broader landscape from which 'stakes' emerge through the 'particularly intense critical spirit' (*ibid*. 32) of the speakers. In turn, the identification of these stakes allows philosophers and their audiences to zoom back in and analyse a piece of literature, a segment of history, a facet of collective life, or a current event, in light of these stakes.

The claim that *culture générale* conferences prevent the 'death of transmission' (Bellamy 2014: 104) therefore takes on a strange cast at second glance: the conferences do not, in fact, seem to prioritise *transmitting* the cultural content considered crucial by highly-educated Lyonnais Catholics.

But this seeming paradox can be resolved in light of one particularly memorable conference held in *Le Collège Supérieur*. The speaker that evening, Chantal Delsol[61], is a renowned philosopher and conservative political thinker. She is also known for belonging to two influential local right-wing Catholic families – by birth the daughter of a Lyonnais academic and by marriage the wife of Charles Millon, long-time President of the *Rhône-Alpes* Regional

[60] This phrase, *les enjeux philosophiques*, is used on the website of *Le Collège Supérieur* and features almost systematically in the director's brief introduction of speakers at the start of conferences.

[61] Not anonymised here.

Council (Paoli 06/03/2008). She is here to present her latest book, ominously titled '*The hatred of the world: totalitarianisms and postmodernity*' (Delsol 2016, all translations mine).

Alluding to Hannah Arendt's work (with which she assumes the audience is familiar), Delsol argues that the totalitarian project remains alive, having simply changed its mode of action since the mid-20th century. The postmodern imperative of emancipation, she explains, perpetuates 'homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth' (Arendt 1979[1951]: vii). Postmodern society, Delsol tells us, 'does not accept the world as it is', and discredits reality through derision, by considering all roots – 'the past, old principles, beliefs, and customs' – to be 'trifling'. *La bagatellisation*, the term she coins to denote the act of rendering everything *trifling*[62], is a totalitarian project because it inexorably levels communities into competing, and lonely, atomised and individualised masses (Arendt 1979[1951]: 318) who 'feel at home' in postmodernity, unaware that it is a metaphysically rootless 'lying world of consistency' (*ibid*. 353). Delsol's description of the postmodern project therefore draws out deeper stakes to the 'death of transmission' (Bellamy: 2014). What is at stake is not only, as it could initially be assumed, the death of *content* – of specific 'old principles, beliefs, and customs', or of high-culture knowledge in nationwide school *programmes*. It is the death of the desire for, and value of, having cultural roots at all.

The students in the audience nod furiously as they take notes, seemingly wholeheartedly applauding her analysis. When, during the later Q&A session, an audience member asks if 'our Christian roots' are the least-'trifling' he can draw on, she answers tangentially by pointing out that 'the rational roots of the Enlightenment and democratic roots of the Revolution have also contributed much metaphysical meaning and direction (*le sens*) to the Nation in recent centuries'. In other words, she implicitly agrees that 'Christian roots' are not trifling and have contributed some 'metaphysical meaning and direction' to the French nation, but she also highlights other non-trifling ways of being 'rooted' in *Frenchness*.

From Delsol's standpoint, beneath the socio-cultural homogeneity of the Lyonnais Catholic audience, it is primarily their agreement with her defense of the *purpose* of roots that proves they are a community of privileged 'inheritors', cast against the backdrop of 'atomised postmoderns'. The present-day faultline of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984) highlighted by

[62] One example of *bagatellisation*, for Delsol, is the refusal of sexual difference, which she considers to be the continuation of a long-term process of 'in-differentiation' – the dismissal and disregard of natural particularisms and social classifications – which had already included the rejection of social classes (2016 : 103-106). In this way she rejoins the discussions of 'universal' and 'natural' sexual complementarity in Chapter One.

Delsol and other conservative French Catholic philosophers no longer lies between kinds of culture – 'high-culture' versus low-culture, religious culture versus secular (Oliphant 2015). Instead, it falls between, on the one hand, any community who values shared cultural logics and 'rootedness' at all, and on the other, the rest of the emancipated postmodern world who lets culture 'die of ingratitude' (Bellamy 2014: 202).

The line of interrogation followed throughout this chapter – *Do the conferences aspirationally or effectively undertake a 're-christianization' of Catholic and/or French 'epistemic and social bodies'?* (Elisha 2011; Souchard 2018) – could therefore only partially contemplate what my interlocutors themselves see as a central purpose of the conferences. By framing the question in terms of an opposition between Catholic and Republican roots, and between civic French integration and a putative ethnocultural 'identitarianism', a broader order of debate was kept out of view. In other words, to return to the dialectic analysis of a *plan en trois parties,* it is by transcending the terms of the initial question (*la problématique*) that it can be resolved.

Conclusion

At length, two traits of the Lyonnais *cathosphère*'s conferencing network emerge. By insisting on the value of 'rootedness' (*l'enracinement*) among a majoritarily Catholic audience, the conferences rejoin the art exhibitions described by Oliphant in the Parisian *Collège des Bernardins,* in that they are intrinsically tailored to '"remind" [an elite public] of their Catholic "heritage"' (2015: 368). Many of the conference speakers jump on the opportunity to include Christian literature or art: as professors strategically advise their students, 'since we have it, we might as well use it' in preparation for nationwide exams.

But the second notable trait is that this heritage is evoked not from a bounded proprietary standpoint, but from the bird's-eye view of philosophy and 'general culture'. This is why the speakers are not called 'philosophy teachers' but 'philosophers': rather than preventing the 'death of transmission' by perpetually *teaching* a given content, they prevent the death of *transmission* – the very process of it – by perpetuating, recursively, the epistemics of rootedness and of general culture.

When conference speakers employ the pronoun 'we' in their talks, it is the majestic plural used across academic discourse in France – the plural which aspirationally recasts entire audiences, and the universal French public, as legitimate 'inheritors' of the 'general culture'

of the nation. And yet, that 'we' is plural in and of itself: the academic 'we' oscillates with 'we bourgeois Catholics', 'we Lyonnais intellectuals', 'we the elite', '*we the French*'. Likewise, if the Catholic conference centres open up a space of 'rootedness' (*enracinement*), it is an equivocal space indeed: one which allows audiences to draw on, and reinvest in, several epistemic attachments to Catholicism, conservatism, academia, 'elite-ness', National Education, and Republicanism. These multiple roots do not all coincide easily; yet they are negotiated and coalesced by my bourgeois Catholic interlocutors in Lyon into a single overarching claim to 'Frenchness'.

To return to the terms of contemporary debates in the anthropology of Christianity, Lyonnais professors' inclusion of religious culture into philosophical conferences affiliated with the secular education system does performs a 're-christianization' of French culture (Elisha 2011), but this neither straightforwardly indexes personal faith, nor predicates a necessary coterminous relationship between present-day Christianity and the French Nation. Instead, it offers Christianity *as* culture, and moreover as a cultural 'root' in a postmodern world: a less-prescriptive articulation of national history than ethnic *jus sanguini*, yet a more 'affective' 'shared identity' (Abizadeh 2002: 496-497) than the abstract rationality of *jus soli* (Lyčka 2007; Stolcke 1997).

Overall, Part One has argued that conservative, bourgeois French Catholics hold a paradoxical place in the secular French Republic – marginal by virtue of their religious identity, yet able not only to negotiate the visible 'religiosity' of this identity, but also to lay claims to cultural and political *Frenchness* more widely. In doing so, they curate the world of French politics – especially as regards the family – and of 'French culture': in other words, the French nation and its secular Republic.

PART TWO

Écologie Intégrale:

An Instance of Political Theology

CHAPTER THREE

‘Catholic Alternatives’:

Prefiguring a New Catholic Political Epistemology

In Part One of this thesis, I showed that French Catholics hold a paradoxical place in the public politics and national culture of the French Republic, in that they are marginal in some respects and yet are able to claim in compelling ways that they are not only French but *the French*. Part Two focuses on the rise, amid the Catholic bourgeoisie, of an association called *Les Alternatives Catholiques*, and argues that they spearhead the development of a new political theology: a differently imagined and scaled ‘good world’ which is both continuous with and transformative of the vision of politics held by Catholics in this setting. This chapter begins by addressing the early development of the paradigm of *écologie intégrale*, or ‘integral ecology’, in the course of *Les AlterCathos*’s initially ‘prefigurative’ explorations into Catholic political epistemology. Offering a new, political addition to anthropological accounts of cultural change and religious transformation, this chapter argues that *écologie intégrale* challenges the pre-existing political practices of bourgeois Catholics and yet crucially retains and celebrates an attachment to ‘roots’.

Introduction

When conducting preliminary research about Catholic spheres in Lyon, I had been told to seek out a relatively new youth-led association called *Les Alternatives Catholiques*, or ‘Catholic Alternatives’. The main reason for this recommendation was pragmatic: most other Catholic organisations, such as the conference centre *Le Collège Supérieur* described in

Chapter Two, gathered regularly but did not run full-time; while Catholic spaces which did host ongoing activities – in particular the offices of the diocese – were not accessible to the general public. By contrast, *Les AlterCathos* were just about to open a café: the main purpose of their street-front space was to host conferences in the evenings, but the daytime transformation into a café/bar served the dual function of financing the association and advertising it to passersby. In *Les AlterCathos*'s café, I was told, I would be welcome anytime and would be able to develop day-to-day relationships with association members as well as visitors and customers from across the '*cathosphère*' (cf. Thesis Introduction). When I received this piece of advice from a Lyonnais acquaintance who acted as my gatekeeper to the field, the café hadn't opened yet – it was undergoing interior remodelling, mainly done by hand by members of *Les AlterCathos*'s organising Committee. It was due to be inaugurated in the Spring of 2016: long enough before my own prospective arrival in late-2016 for routines and a customer-base to be established, my gatekeeper assured me, but still recent enough that the arrival of an anthropologist would be taken in stride as part of the new developments. It would be a perfect conduit into the elite, bourgeois Catholic networks described throughout Part One; a meeting-ground where members of Catholic schools, associations, and parishes across Lyon would undoubtedly congregate.

At the time, I did not notice the paradox in the fact that an association purporting to be 'alternative' – *Les Alternatives Catholiques* – was hailed as a entrypoint into all the traditional Catholic networks in town. My gatekeeper, Anne-Sophie, had been a member of *Les AlterCathos* herself between 2011 and 2012 while she prepared her *agrégation*, the competitive nationwide examination which grants civil servant status to elite young professors, at the *École Normale Supérieure de Lyon*. I met Anne-Sophie a few years later while she held a year-long teaching post at Cambridge; I knew her as a devout Catholic and a very conservative young woman, who only ever wore skirts and dresses rather than trousers in accordance with her family's traditionalist stance on appropriate feminine attire. I assumed that Anne-Sophie must be representative of the members of *Les AlterCathos*, since she had been one of their founding members in 2011 – this also coincided with her claim that the association had ties to the traditional Catholic networks of Lyon – and I did not think too much about the 'alternatives' in their name. It was only much later that I realised I had misjudged Anne-Sophie by viewing her as 'traditionalist' by my standards rather than her own. Compared to my experience of Catholicism, limited to attending Mass at Christmas and Easter, Anne-Sophie had seemed very observant not only in her ritual practice but also in her

upholding of certain social and cultural strictures. However, from her family's point of view, Anne-Sophie was accruing a reputation as a non-conformist with every passing year: the second-youngest of eight siblings, she was the first to pursue a year abroad, and she conspicuously lacked a fiancé aged 23 while all her elder brothers and sisters, employed in the military or as primary-school teachers along gendered lines, had already married and had children at that age. Anne-Sophie envisioned her future along the same lines of matrimony, motherhood, and employment in education as her sisters, but she wanted each step to be a fully matured decision, and did not intend to settle down before having pushed her studies in Modernist Literature to the full extent of a doctoral thesis. In short, Anne-Sophie was willing, and even eager, to make minute shifts, even if only delays, to the life-templates of her upbringing. To the extent that she insisted on control over her life-choices – that she *considered* alternatives – she already *was* 'alternative' among her family. And it is in this sense that Anne-Sophie turned out to be representative of *Les Alternatives Catholiques* after all: not because she was a devout or traditionalist Catholic, but because she was self-aware about her sociocultural background and invested in speaking back to it with the insights gained from taking a bird's-eye view of her own life-course.

Anne-Sophie introduced me to *Les Alternatives Catholiques*, and in turn her story is a fitting introduction to Part Two of this thesis, which focuses on *Les AlterCathos*'s development of a new Catholic political theology they call *écologie intégrale*, or 'integral ecology'. The relationship of Anne-Sophie to her family is mirrored in the relationship between *Les AlterCathos* and the *cathosphère* of Lyon – which encompasses the *Manif Pour Tous* demonstrators, the *grandes familles lyonnaises*, and the elite schools and conference centres introduced in Part One. Like Anne-Sophie, *Les AlterCathos* indubitably *belong* among their Catholic background yet stand out due to their reflexive gaze which yields a balance of self-acceptance and self-critique. Consequently, Part Two of this thesis both proceeds from Part One and up-ends it: it continues Part One's exploration of Lyonnais Catholics' investments in politics, public life, and the nation, but it does so through the case study of *Les AlterCathos*'s efforts to instill change among their broader sociocultural background. As a result, the broad frameworks and themes of the first two chapters – Catholic experiences of public protest, traditional visions of the family and mankind, and efforts to protect the transmission of 'general culture' – all apply to *Les AlterCathos*, but the reverse is not true: the following three chapters concern *Les AlterCathos* alone and showcase the extent to which their efforts to 'be political as Catholics' through *écologie intégrale* branch out from the templates of Part One.

Joel Robbins, drawing on Dumontian structuralism, argues that 'the motives for cultural change must originally be given in the terms of the culture that is changing, and this despite the fact that the changes those motives initiate may quickly render the motives themselves obsolete' (2004: 2). This was very much the case throughout the gradual development of the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* by *Les AlterCathos* since 2011. As this chapter demonstrates, the impetus for *Les AlterCathos*'s initial efforts to devise a new way of 'being political as Catholics' was solidly grounded in the terms described throughout Part One of this thesis: the creation and early development of *Les AlterCathos* owes much to its founding members' personal experience of *La Manif Pour Tous* (Chapter One) and involvement in elite schools and Catholic conference networks (Chapter Two). I will show in this chapter that it is through a growing reflexivity about their own largely right-wing and bourgeois background that *Les AlterCathos* consolidated the terms of *écologie intégrale*: a new paradigm for 'being political as Catholics' that is non-partisan, social, and green.

In this chapter, I will argue that *écologie intégrale* challenges the pre-existing socio-political practices of bourgeois Catholics and yet crucially retains and celebrates an attachment to 'roots' – in other words, *écologie intégrale* paradoxically values the sociocultural milieu undergoing transformation even as it renders it obsolete. It does so, I will show, precisely by viewing this milieu in terms of 'roots': undeniable yet not all-encompassing matter, matter which informs but does not dictate the conduct of my interlocutors' (social, political, and ethical) lives. To return to Dumont's theoretical language, *écologie intégrale* is, I will argue throughout Part Two, a 'hierarchical encompassment' of potentially-contradictory values (L.Dumont 1986: 525; 1980 [1970]: 240; Robbins 2009, 2013b; Haynes & Hickel 2016), but centrally, it is self-conscious about this aspect of its own conceptual make-up. Rather than experiencing the moral torment suffered by Joel Robbins's Urapmin interlocutors as they face contradictions between old and new value systems (2004), *Les AlterCathos* are reflexive about the ways in which their new paradigm allows the continued existance of remnants of the old, and are alert to the ways in which their longstanding *habitus* (to which they refer in exactly such Bourdieusian terms) can be accommodated.

If Part Two is overall concerned with the *praxis* of 'integral ecology', its first chapter – Chapter Three – focuses on the formulation of this paradigm concomitant to the development of *Les Alternatives Catholiques*, from their creation in 2011 to the 'ethnographic present' of late-2016 and 2017. During my fieldwork, *Les AlterCathos* made two layered claims: that they aimed to live in accordance with *écologie intégrale*, and that this, in turn, was in line

with Pope Francis's recently-published encyclical letter *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (2015). This chapter's goal, therefore, is to introduce the key tenets of *écologie intégrale* and *Laudato Si'* while exploring what is indexed by these claims – is this an instance of growing anti-modern religious fundamentalism, a 'literalism' (Harding 2001) oriented towards a Papal encyclical rather than the Bible? Or is it something else? My inquiry cross-cuts two familiar lines of investigation in the anthropology of religion: on the one hand, recent work on religious 'grand schemes', which employs the notion of 'everyday ethics' to account for 'the complex duality of religion as an everyday practice and a normative doctrine' (Schielke & Debevec 2012: 1), and on the other hand, the more longstanding interest in forms of observant religious practice under political modernity (Casanova 1994; Orsi 2012). In this chapter, by tracing the development of *écologie intégrale* after the creation of *Les AlterCathos* in 2011 – before the publication of *Laudato Si'* in 2015 – I aim to highlight several stages in the consolidation of this paradigm: I argue that it was established as a new Catholic political epistemology, and only later were its central tenets solidified to map onto the concerns of *Laudato Si'*. Furthermore, it is at this later stage that the element of ethical injunction to 'live in accordance with' or 'follow' *écologie intégrale* arose – previously, its main purpose had been as a 'grid of analysis' to understand contemporary socio-political issues. This chapter therefore launches Part Two's investigation of the religious paradigm of *écologie intégrale* through two angles which do not often take centre stage in anthropological studies of religious 'grand schemes' and 'everyday practices': the angle of politics, and the angle of 'elite' lay actors.

'Grand schemes' in/and action in the anthropologies of religion and politics

Les Alternatives Catholiques, through their name, make two bold claims: that they are alternative, and that they are Catholic. However, the association's founders are relatively happy to admit that at its inception in 2011, it was not entirely clear what they wanted to be alternative to, or how; nor how they intended to be 'Catholic', particularly as far as ritual practice and prayer went[63]. Raphaël Saônat[64], one of the Vice-Presidents of the association, once summarised the situation by stating that the existence of *Les AlterCathos* far predated its

[63] The question of faith and piety in *Les AlterCathos*'s practices is the focus of the following chapter.

[64] Unless otherwise indicated, all names are pseudonyms, as is the case for Raphaël.

essence. The phenomenological axiom that 'existence preceeds essence' is well-known in gender studies through the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and later of Judith Butler (1988), but here Raphaël was making more direct – and ironic – reference to the atheistic grounds of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist humanism. For Sartre, no God ordains Man's essence, and therefore Man's freedom is also a condemnation to suffer the weight of one's own responsibility in the absence of externally-dictated direction (1945). As Raphaël describes it, the joint freedom and responsibility – in other words, the lack of direction – in the early days of *Les AlterCathos* was an unavoidable stage in the creation of their project, which was predicated precisely on 'newness' (Krøijer 2015: 12). Within a few short years, however, guiding principles were articulated by *Les AlterCathos*'s Committee of founding members, with the intention of steering the assocation's further development. By the time I conducted my fieldwork throughout the year 2017, *Les AlterCathos* evoked, relatively interchangeably, the notion of *écologie intégrale* and Pope Francis's recently-published encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) as 'inspirations', 'guides', and 'driving forces' (*notre moteur*).

In order to understand what is at stake in *Les AlterCathos*'s development of the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* and their reading of *Laudato Si',* this chapter must keep several seemingly contradictory elements in view simultaneously. Firstly, there seems to be a conflict of intentions: *Les AlterCathos* profess to follow a Papal encyclical – an affirmation which suggests doctrinal obedience and deference to the institutions of the Church – but they also self-define as an 'alternative' association. This chapter must therefore clarify how *Les AlterCathos* intend to both conform and be different. Secondly, there seems to be a chronological and conceptual ambiguity in the way that *Les AlterCathos* cite both '*écologie intégrale*' and '*Laudato Si'*' as inspirations. When prompted, *Les AlterCathos* clarify that their interest in *Laudato Si'* rests primarily on the fact that it employs the notion of 'integral ecology' – indeed one of its six chapters is entitled 'Integral Ecology' (Pope Francis 2015: §137-§162) – but they simultaneously affirm that they had independently articulated their own paradigm called *écologie intégrale* before the publication of the encyclical. This chapter must therefore explore what was meant by '*écologie intégrale*' in the early years of the association (2011-2015), and how this paradigm came to intermingle with Pope Francis's own homonymous notion. In order to approach *Les AlterCathos*'s 'essence' – their desire to be 'alternative', expressed in an initial indeterminacy and later in a contrastingly precise, rather normative intentional language inspired by religious texts – preliminary theoretical roadmaps can be drawn from the anthropology of politics and its familiarity with 'alternative' projects

(Krøijer 2015), and from the anthropology of religion and its treatment of doctrine and 'grand schemes' (Schielke & Debevec 2012).

Most obviously, my interlocutors' claims that they 'follow' *écologie intégrale* and *Laudato Si'* relate to the anthropological literature on ethnographic evocations of Christian doctrine (Harding 2001; Bielo 2009; Engelke 2007, 2013; Mayblin 2017). One of the core puzzles in the anthropology of religion has long been the awareness that religious actors often lead their lives in ways which are only partially or ambiguously observant of the normative religious doctrines that they simultaneously advocate (Schielke & Debevec 2012). This observation initially led anthropologists to evaluate ethnographic case studies according to how 'pure' or 'popular' an expression of religion they showcased – this resulted in the use of conceptual binaries separating doctrine from practice, institutional religious elites from laypersons, 'great' from 'little' traditions (Redfield 1960; Gellner 1981), 'high church' from folk or popular belief, all binaries in which the former term was perceived as more truly religious than the latter (McGuire 2008: 45-46). Such an analytical stance views doctrine as something to be 'applied'; it asks whether the faithful are doing so, and gauges the extent to which syncretism with local culture may have developed. But Catholic encyclicals complicate this approach by introducing a novel timeframe and equivocal normative character into the study of Christian doctrine and its 'applicability'.

By contrast to the *longue durée* which is often taken for granted in discussions of the Bible, Roman Catholic encyclicals or 'circular letters' constitute an ever-rejuvenated canon. Encyclicals are the second-highest ranking documents issued by the Pope, a status which in practice introduces a measure of ambiguity around their significance: while it is clear that encyclicals are potent expressions of the Pope's will and authority, they are nonetheless not meant to promulgate laws and definitive teachings around doctrine and the faith. Encyclicals are not considered expressions of 'Papal infallibility' unless explicitly stated, and afford a degree of latitude to their recipients[65]. Historically, they were 'letters' in the commonsense understanding of the term, relatively short documents addressed regularly to bishops around the world or in a given area, corresponding on matters of varying importance. In recent decades, however, encyclicals have grown rarer and longer: they target fewer topics, but do so more in-depth, and have resultingly acquired a more sensational character (Hoenes del Pinal

[65] A caveat confirmed by Pope Pius XII: 'Nor must it be thought that what is expounded in Encyclical Letters does not of itself demand consent, since in writing such Letters the Popes do not exercise the supreme power of their Teaching Authority. For these matters are taught with the ordinary teaching authority' (1950: §20).

2019: 293). Newly-elected Popes' first encyclicals – such as Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*[66] – are eagerly-awaited and viewed as touchstones for the new pontiff's priorities. A growing impetus for lay Catholics to engage with these documents directly (*ibid.*), eschewing intermediary institutional exegesis, further complicates understandings of their (partially) normative character and of the extent and manner in which the Pope's wishes must be put into practice.

I suggest that the study of Catholic encyclicals – and, here, of the notion of *écologie intégrale*, partly drawn from *Laudato Si'* – is best served by following recent work focusing on 'everyday religion'; an approach inspired by the anthropology of ethics which has sought to avoid analyses based on 'pure'/'popular' hierarchical binaries (Schielke & Debevec 2012; de Certeau 1984, 1998; Jackson 1989, 1996; see also Fadil & Fernando 2015). The first premise of this approach is that any form of religion must be considered 'truly religious' on the same terms, abandoning the preconception that 'pure' textual doctrine should serve as a benchmark of our interlocutors' religiosity (Stewart & Shaw 1994). Its second premise is that anthropologists should define religious 'grand schemes' according to what our interlocutors themselves make of them (Schielke & Debevec 2012). From this perspective, the fact that normative doctrines and grand schemes are 'granted some kind of independent existence outside and above' the persons living (more or less) by their tenets is a matter of analytical interest in and of itself (*ibid.* 7), rather than a precondition for the study of religion. Drawing on Humphrey and Laidlaw's theory of ritual (1994), Schielke and Debevec suggest that

> [The] apparent perfection and factuality of grand schemes turns into a pragmatic condition of action. By being granted coherence and objective power, they become things that people approach, use and do. (2012: 7)

In short, the first question which must be asked is not how *Laudato Si'* is applied, but how it *becomes* an applicable – and desirable – 'grand scheme' in my interlocutors' minds in the first place[67]. This is why, in this chapter, I am primarily interested in *Les AlterCathos*'s early years

[66] *Laudato Si'* is technically Pope Francis's second encyclical, but it is well-known that his first publication, *Lumen fidei* (2013), had been drafted by his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI before the latter's retirement. Consequently, *Laudato Si'* is viewed as the first indicator of Francis's own concerns.

[67] Eric Hoenes del Pinal's study of 'Reading *Laudato Si'* in the Verapaz' skirts the line in this respect, questioning the reception of *Laudato Si'* but framing it as a straightforward pronouncement: 'It behooves us, then, to think about how these theological pronouncements are being taken up by Roman Catholics around the

before the publication of *Laudato Si'* – the initial indeterminacy surrounding the creation of the association in 2011, and the development of the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* as a way of being 'alternative', as these frame their subsequent reception of the encyclical.

Les Alternatives Catholiques – 'Catholic Alternatives' – were founded in 2011 by a small group of postgraduate philosophy students at the elite and State-run *École Normale Supérieure de Lyon*. When *AlterCathos* members reminisce about their early days, they insist on this context, more often than on the purpose, of the birth of their association – *how Les AlterCathos* came to be, almost irresistibly produced by a pell-mell set of circumstances, rather than *why* they were created. In the midst of this initial indeterminacy, only one element provided some direction: the name of the association and its claim to 'alternativeness'. In order to explore this period of *Les AlterCathos*'s existence, I draw on the anthropology of politics, rather than religion. Alternative activist movements whose protests, marches, and communes aim to 'build a new society in the shell of the old' (Graeber 2009) experience a similar duality between everyday practice and normative ideology to that described earlier with reference to religious doctrine, but they also include an element of deliberate transformation which is not often present in the anthropology of religion (with the exception of Robbins 2004). Recent work on 'prefigurative politics' (Boggs 1977) – a term which refers to leftist movements who embody, albeit on a small scale, the change they want to see in the world[68] – has disproved the assumption that such movements are underpinned by pre-existing, explicit, detailed ideological templates. Instead, Marianne Maeckelbergh (2011) and Stine Krøijer (2015) suggest that activist collectives' experimental efforts are simply based on broad shared values, such as anti-capitalism and the rejection of the state; and therefore that everyday actions define the gradual constitution of these transformative new politics. In this sense, the analytical setup of the literature on prefigurative politics allows the study of 'alternative' projects without knowing ahead of time what form those alternatives will take or where they intend to lead; it is more open-ended than Joel Robbins's account of religious change among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea, which relies to a larger extent on foreknowledge of the intentional 'end-point' for the Urapmins' conversion, namely charismatic Christianity (2004). Following Krøijer (2015), therefore, I aim in this chapter to describe the intentional core of *Les AlterCathos* – its essence – as an emergent rather than

world. To what extent do they see the theological pronouncements disseminated from the Vatican as relevant to their daily lives *qua* Catholics?' (2019 : 293)

[68] By contrast with the Marxist insistence on total revolution (Krøijer 2015: 4).

primordial element, through a chronological exploration of the association's development and concomitant articulation of the paradigm of *écologie intégrale*.

'Renovating society, not the Church'

The principal instigator of *Les AlterCathos* is called David Coureau. Born and raised in a mid-sized town of the region of Berry in central France, he moved to Lyon after high school to attend a prestigious and selective two-year 'preparatory class' in literature, classics, and the humanities (*hypokhâgne/khâgne*) at the private and Catholic *École Sainte-Marie*, also known as *Les Maristes*. There, David met fellow students Marie Sève and Raphaël Saônat, who were both originally from Lyon. Their philosophy class was taught by Gérard Leval, a well-known[69] philosopher in Lyonnais Catholic spheres, who encouraged them to go beyond the curriculum of the *classe préparatoire* and introduced them to his external conference centre, *Le Collège Supérieur*. Leval's influence was decisive, as both David and Raphaël decided to specialise in philosophy for the subsequent three years of the Master's-track *Grandes Écoles*, or 'Great Schools'[70].

Access to the *Grandes Écoles* is regulated by a nationwide contest (*concours*), which students across France sit at the end of their two-year *classe préparatoire*. The *École Normale Supérieure*, which both David and Raphaël qualified for, is the most elite, but neither David nor Raphaël ranked high enough to obtain the coveted few places in philosophy at the Parisian campus ('*Ulm*') of the *ENS*. Prioritising academic subject over prestige, they both chose to attend the second-best campus of the *ENS*, in Lyon, where they were guaranteed a place on the philosophy course. For her part, Marie's priority was first and foremost to remain in Lyon, near her family. She joined the *Institut d'Urbanisme* (Institute of Urban Development), which is situated further down the same street as the *ENS Lyon*, where her boyfriend at the time was reading History in the same cohort as David and Raphaël.

At the *ENS*, David became friends, and later housemates, with Hilaire Broie de Bugey, who was studying modern literature. A newcomer to Lyon, Hilaire had grown up in Bourgogne, not overly far from David's own hometown; and like David, Hilaire's family background was

[69] But anonymised here!

[70] See Chapter Two for an introduction to, and discussion of, the context of these elite Catholic schools and conference centres.

one of provincial Catholic *petite bourgeoisie*. While neither family had substantial financial resources, both had longstanding roots in their respective towns, and in particular in their parish communities. Hilaire's father worked in the wood-based energy sector and his mother was a psycho-motor therapist; David's father, for his part, had worked for fourteen years at the local broadcasting station *Radio Chrétienne Francophone* (*RCF*), a network of Catholic community radios run associatively by a mix of volunteers and employees across France and Belgium. The *ENS* represented new ground for David and Hilaire in one major respect: it was their first foray into the State-run secular education system, after having attended private Catholic schools in high school and throughout the *classe préparatoire*.

During David and Hilaire's time at the *ENS*, the school hosted a small, poorly-funded Catholic Chaplaincy, which has since been closed down by the school board in an effort to further secularize its premises. It is in reaction to the Chaplaincy's paltry intellectual and spiritual offerings – as well as in reaction to the awareness that even this little amount of Catholicism within the secular *ENS* was a matter of controversy – that David and Hilaire initially formulated the project of founding an external reflection group for the sake of their Catholic friends. David, in particular, was instrumental in contacting his erstwhile classmates from *Les Maristes* and gathering those who had, after the unpredictable lottery of the *Grandes Écoles* contest, ended up remaining in Lyon. When Marie remembers the early days of *Les AlterCathos*, she tends to laughingly shrug off her own involvement, and to portray herself primarily as a happenstance bystander to David's single-minded, self-appointed mission to launch the 'Catholic Alternatives', a name he had already chosen before anyone else joined him in the venture.

Marie recalls that the name puzzled David's interlocutors, who worried that he was setting up some sort of 'heretic project', in her words – that his aim was to 'be Catholic otherwise' in the face of the disappointing Chaplaincy. David had to clear up this confusion: what the name '*AlterCathos*' indexed, he claimed, was instead a desire to 'be alternative *as* Catholics'. His catchphrase of the time, Marie and David both reminisced, was 'renovating society, not the Church' (*rénover la société, pas l'Église*), though the details of how this would be envisaged and practiced were yet to be determined. David's as-yet nebulous desire to be 'alternative', predicated on resistance to (a vision of) mainstream society, therefore rejoins the literature on radical activism: Stine Krøijer argues that 'intentionality and political ideologies are possible effects', rather than 'the motivating factors', of participation in alterglobalization movements (2015: 4-5). Indeed, Hilaire, Raphaël, and Marie, who nowadays are all credited as founders

and have been the association's Vice-Presidents since its creation in 2011, often downplay their own initial involvement as an 'absorption' (*ibid*.: 5) into a common activity, rather than an intentional decision.

Krøijer recommends not taking for granted that participants in radical activism must hold an *a priori* conception of 'a shared identity or a single vision of social change' (*ibid*.: 4; Maeckelbergh 2009: 6-7; Eschle 2011). In the case of *Les AlterCathos*, however, it is quite clear that the association was initially envisaged as a 'project of collective identity' (Eschle 2011: 373) relying on participants' shared Catholicism. To this extent, the creation of *Les AlterCathos* could seem closer to the identity politics of feminist or indigenous movements described by New Social Movement theorists (Melucci 1996, 2003: 42; *contra* Krøijer 2015). But the divergence from Krøijer's model is a matter of scale, insofar as *Les AlterCathos* initially – and still so recently – boiled down to David as a one-man project. David has always been the undisputed President of the association because he alone comported himself as an undeniable 'primordially existing actor' (Krøijer 2015: 25, Melucci 1996), while the rest of the association predominantly constituted an 'affinity group' gathered on the basis of their 'social life outside of political action' (2015: 10-11, 22) rather than on the basis of an explicit, shared 'vision of social change' (*ibid*. 4).

At this stage, however, the association was only labelled 'alternative' – it was not yet defined as a *political* project, although this followed shortly thereafter. In the following sections, I follow Krøijer's call to study the form of political movements as 'mediated manifestations of intentionality' (*ibid*.: 6): this approach can be employed to explore the evolving form of *Les AlterCathos* in their early years, and through form, their developing intentionality.

Catholic alternatives and/as/are modern politics[71]

Still trying to attract friends to join him in creating *Les AlterCathos*, David clarified one respect in which he hoped to be 'alternative' as a Catholic: by debating the commonplace assumption that there are only two possibilities for French Catholics to engage in party politics. These two options, on either side of the Left-Right spectrum, were summarized by Marie as 'the stereotypes of pro-life right-wing *cathos de droite* and left-wing *cathos de*

[71] I paraphrase Ruth Marshall's chapter title, 'Pious and/as/is Modern' (2009: 3).

gauche who only care about prisons and migrants'. It is through this explicit reference to party politics that David pursued his 'intensive recruitment efforts' for Marie to join his project, 'hounding her' (in her own words) in the *ENS* cafeteria where she used to spend lunchtimes with her boyfriend. Marie was largely unconvinced, not because she adhered to one of these 'stereotypical' political stances herself, but because she doubted the very premise of engaging with party politics from an explicitly Catholic standpoint:

> At the start, it wasn't very clear what these '*AlterCathos*' were meant to be, to the point that I even heard it called a 'Catholic party'. But for me, the *PCD* [Christian Democrats Party] and all, it's not my thing! I'm convinced that something calling itself a 'Christian party', in politics, isn't destined to go anywhere. So every time David came and sat at my table, at lunchtime, I'd turn him down.

A significant stage of the creation of *Les AlterCathos* therefore involved defining boundaries or, to continue using Krøijer's terms, rejecting possible forms before settling on an acceptable one. This is a familiar anthropological trope: boundaries, or markers of what one *is not*, are often more explicitly articulated than what one *is* (Barth 1969; McDonald 1989). What is notable here is not only that Marie and the other founding members rejected possible affiliations with either 'Right-wing' or 'Left-wing' politics, but that they rejected the idea of Catholic political parties altogether. *Les AlterCathos* therefore launched their project of 'being political as Catholics' outside of the political institutions of the State, implicitly upholding the modern view that religion and State politics are – and should be – two separate spheres (Casanova 1994; Asad 2003). This is not a negligible point in the context of traditional Catholic populations: during my fieldwork in Lyon, I met several families (from the aristocratic segments of the *cathosphère*) who professed the belief that France should still be governed by a Catholic, divinely-anointed King. *Les AlterCathos,* for their part, were not only *not* monarchist, but more widely disagreed with religious identities being used as a basis for party politics or public engagements with the State (contrary to the identity-based New Social Movements mentioned earlier – and cf. Chapter One).

By viewing Marie and the other *AlterCathos* founders as Catholic 'moderns', I do not wish to index the sort of reflexive process described elsewhere in the anthropology of religion by authors who have striven to counter the longstanding depiction of observant religious communities as non-modern or anti-modern (Casanova 1994; Orsi 2012). For example, the pious Lebanese Shi'i women described by Ruth Marshall reflect upon, and advertise, their own 'modernity': Marshall details their discursive constitution of 'pious modern' identities

partly inspired by, and partly distinct from, their view of Western modernity (2009). Instead, I consider that *Les AlterCathos*'s early views on the (undesirable) intersection of religion and statecraft had little or nothing to do with religious observance[72]. I argue that my Catholic interlocutors are moderns because the secular nature of statecraft is the one thing they never questioned during the otherwise intensely reflexive process of building *Les AlterCathos* as both 'political' and 'Catholic'. Emic and etic language are tightly entwined here: my interlocutors' baseline conception of 'religion' and 'politics' as separate domains of life (Casanova 1994; Asad 2003) stems historically from the European Enlightenment; as do the Social Sciences, which, in turn, they studied during their *classe préparatoire* to the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree.

In the meantime, David's efforts to recruit Marie and others to join him in developing a new association finally succeeded when he temporarily abandoned the unclear and potentially politically inflammatory name – 'Catholic Alternatives' – which he had been so set upon at first. Marie recalls:

> At one point he showed up and said, "okay, Marie, we're not quite sure what '*Les AlterCathos*' will turn out to be, but there's this other thing we're putting together, with the help of our old philosophy teacher", Gérard Leval, from when we were all studying together in *khâgne*. "And so we're" – this is still David trying to recruit me – "we're going to start the 'Montalembert Circle', as an homage to Montalembert, the 19th-century Christian liberal, and it's going to be super cool and it'll be a reflection circle". So I say, all right, a reflection circle, why not, I'll come have a look, and on the other hand for your '*AlterCathos*' you can dream on.

While she was reticent to participate in any kind of Catholic party politics, Marie was unopposed to the idea of an intellectual reflection group about historical Catholic figures: this proposition, modelled on their philosophy professor's conference centre *Le Collège Supérieur*, rejoined the trope of elite 'general culture' described in Chapter Two. Instead of phrasing the association's aims in terms of 'religion' and 'politics' – and especially 'doing

[72] It could have done: a number of texts in the Catholic canon urge a separation between piety and politics. My interlocutors *could* have justified their views with reference to doctrine such as the Biblical injunction to 'render unto Caesar what is Caesar's', the well-known 2nd-century 'Epistle to Diognetus' which explains the absence of Christian polities by stating that 'Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world', or yet the numerous Papal encyclicals which have been written to counsel French Catholics on how to engage with the Republic (Pius VI 1791; Leo XIII 1884, 1892, 1899; Pius X 1906a, 1906b, 1907, 1910; Pius XI 1924) – but they never mentioned any of these texts as inspirations.

politics as religious actors', a perspective which David's friends were visibly uncomfortable with since they refused to join the incipient association – David's shift to framing the group as a 'reflection circle' depoliticised the project in their minds (Ferguson 1994; Candea 2011). By mimicking the form of *culture générale* lectures, David's (temporary) advertisement of the 'Montalembert Circle' project re-labelled Catholic history as more neutral 'culture' (Oliphant 2015), and re-labelled the search for (political) 'alternatives' as more neutral 'education'. This was a successful strategic move: it is on the basis of this premise that Marie, along with Raphaël and Hilaire (and Anne-Sophie, introduced at the start of this chapter), followed David's lead.

The newly-formed discussion group gathered twelve students in their early-twenties, all connected to David via either the *ENS* or *Les Maristes*, along with Gérard Leval. The group's initial meeting focused on an exploration of the life of Charles de Montalembert, a prolific newspaperman and parliamentarian who promoted Catholic liberalism first against the anticlerical Second Republic and then against the absolutist Second Empire. After Montalembert, the gathered students agreed to move on to discuss other Catholic public figures, journalists, lawyers, and philosophers from the 19th century to the present. As Marie reflected on in 2017 with a touch of irony,

> I ended up being part of the 'Catholic Alternatives' anyway, because it was inherently one and the same with the Montalembert Circle: thinking about previous generations' examples of links between faith and politics, in order to reflect on alternatives to today's political landscape in France.

A new Catholic political epistemology

In 2011, *AlterCathos* meetings – they gave up on the name 'Montalembert Circle' when they moved on to discuss other historical figures – took place weekly and systematically started with a presentation given by one of the members, by Gérard Leval, or by an invited external speaker. Each week addressed a single topic, and the designated speaker's role was to produce '*un topo'*, a detailed exposé or rundown lasting twenty minutes or so. Marie highlights the – largely incidental – symbolism of this phase:

> I never get bored of joking that there were the twelve of us, with Gérard Leval, the Master to us all (*notre Maître à tous*), who gave us form (*de l'ossature*) by doing the *topos* at first, but who then let us live our lives as disciples (*nos vies de disciples*)!

Les AlterCathos chose to rely on two sources of material, which formed the basis of the *topos* and of their accumulating intellectual resources. On the one hand, they explored the biographies of Catholic historical figures with an investment in French – and later, international – politics. On the other hand, they worked their way through the compendium of the Catholic Social Teaching (CST), or Church Social Doctrine (*Doctrine Sociale de l'Église*). The Social Teaching encompasses a collection of texts written by Popes since the late-19th century, which address the social responsibilities of Catholics in political contexts such as the Industrial Revolution, the Cold War, and the rise of globalisation. The CST offers a compact list of doctrinal concepts concerning human dignity and social justice – such as the 'principle of subsidiarity', the 'dignity of work', the 'preferential option for the poor', or the 'universal destination of goods' – which are intended to serve as normative and value-driven guides for Catholics to calibrate their lives in society for the Common Good. For the time being, however, *Les AlterCathos* engaged with the encyclicals of the Catholic Social Teaching on the same terms as they did the biographies of Catholic figures, rather than as binding doctrinal texts (Engelke 2007; Schielke & Debevec 2012). *Les AlterCathos*'s two lines of investigation were seen as separate insofar as the historical figures chosen did not refer to the Catholic Social Teaching themselves, or only did so in very fragmentary ways. Indeed, it is only in 2004 that these Papal writings were collated into the compendium that is now known as the Social Teaching, on the initiative of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Les AlterCathos thus embarked on a comparative and cross-referential project of political analysis. After their initial discovery of the life of Montalembert – their erstwhile namesake – they progressed chronologically. One weekend introduced Frédéric Ozanam, an early-19th century lawyer and the founder of the now-international Saint Vincent de Paul charity. Another meeting focused on turn-of-the-century author and utopian socialist Charles Péguy, and several weeks were devoted to Simone Weil, a radical 1930s and early-1940s philosopher and anti-fascist revolutionary of Jewish origin whose later life was marked by intense Catholic mysticism. Expanding their range of sources to track Catholic 'roots' beyond the bounds of France, *Les AlterCathos* included figures such as American anarchist Dorothy Day and the Latin American thinkers of Liberation Theology. *Les AlterCathos* dissected and compared these lives: why did Péguy's Catholicism fuel his nationalism and anti-pacifism during World War I, they wondered? On the contrary, why did Weil's Catholic conversion instead develop out of her Marxist and pacifist resistance during the Spanish Civil War and

the outbreak of World War II? The very different lives led by these Catholic predecessors served to emphasize that, notwithstanding their shared faith, there exists a fundamental indeterminacy around how and why the intellectual and spiritual roots of Catholicism come to support political projects. This is where *Les AlterCathos*'s second source of inspiration, the Church Social Teaching, came into play. If historical Catholic figures offered too much empirical matter and too little theoretical consensus, the reverse was true of the Catholic Social Teaching. The central tenets of the CST are clearly exposed in theory, with reference to detailed theological underpinnings, but their translation and applicability in daily life are left to the reader's own devices. What does the notion of Catholic 'human dignity' add to an analysis of past and present inequalities, *Les AlterCathos* wondered? How, if at all, can the 'universal destination of goods' intersect with industrial production or late-capitalist modes of acquisition? And so on and so forth.

This stage in *Les AlterCathos*'s history is once again illuminated by Krøijer's analytical model for the development of Left radical activism: Krøijer's focus is on 'political action as form' (2015: 5), and her argument is that by 'momentarily [giving] determinate form to the indeterminate' (*ibid*. 12), such forms 'materialize intentions' (*ibid*. 6). Indeed, it is through the form of the philosophical meeting, and of the 'general culture' conference (Chapter Two), that early elements of determinacy appeared in their initially indeterminate project. More specifically, it is through their slight adjustment of the usual format of conferences that *Les AlterCathos* manifested their intentions. Contrary to the conferences described in Chapter Two – which assume prior knowledge on the part of the audience – *AlterCathos* meetings have always included an element of research and of teaching, insisting on the importance of a thorough, personal understanding of core concepts and historical facts. Furthermore, this conceptual language was explicitly destined to counter, and eventually replace, the participants' pre-existing use of the 'Left-Right' binary as a frame of political analysis. During my fieldwork in 2017, David recalled that they 'used to say that we're taking a step back, we're putting ourselves on the margins of political parties' (*on se met en marge des partis*): not only did they stop using the concerns of French political parties as a frame of reference, they altogether tried to separate their understanding of 'politics' from party politics. By doing so, David explained, they clarified that their purpose was not to offer 'an' alternative or 'their' alternative, as a single, unified prescription, but instead to adopt an attitude of investigative open-mindedness:

> What we mean by 'putting ourselves on the margin' is that we're also taking a step back from all parties' hegemonic projects, their way of saying 'with this campaign program, we are going to change everything, we are going to change everything on our own'. Instead, our plan is to state what we're doing, to publish about what we think and do. And so in this sense we're open to the universal (*on a une ouverture à l'universel*), but beyond that we have no pretensions... I mean, I hope we don't have that boundless (*démesurée*) pretension to change the face of the Earth, or of France, nor even of Lyon.

Contrary to usual Catholic conference centres' purely intellectual pursuits, *Les AlterCathos* saw their own meetings as establishing a continuity between their object of study – empirical forms of Catholic politics – and their own lives. By 'politics', *Les AlterCathos* indexed not only past Catholics' engagement in governance, but more widely addressed the 'political' elements of power, hierarchy, hegemony, or dispute in Catholic figures' economic and social behaviours, embedded in contingent socio-historical contexts. Transcending their earlier discomfort with the idea of Catholic engagements in party politics, *Les AlterCathos*'s discussions prompted them to perceive 'the political' as a far wider field than only the institutions of the State. The historical figures that *Les AlterCathos* discussed 'were political as Catholics' everyday and in all of their actions – and so were they, in the contemporary context of France.

The new epistemological 'grid of analysis' (*grille d'analyse*) they developed, through comparisons with historical case studies and with the doctrinal theory of the Church Social Teaching, was an applicable frame of reference through which to develop their opinions on present-day political, economic, and social matters. During each *AlterCathos* meeting, the thematic exposé of the *topo* was followed by an in-depth discussion of contemporary French and international life. Now, Marie explains, 'the idea was to make a link between *our* passion for politics and *our* faith[73]' – as actors and not just as academic observers. The focus was no longer solely on the contextual conditions from which different Catholic 'visions of the world' had arisen through time, but shifted to a first-person use of the conceptual tools borrowed from history and from the Church Social Teaching, to discuss selected

[73] By 'faith' (*notre foi*), here, Marie indexes their efforts to partake of a Catholic culture they saw as their own – embodied in the history of Catholic figures and in the concepts of the CST – but also the complex transitions which occurred once *Les AlterCathos* had thoroughly discovered the CST in 'intellectual' terms and started considering, on an individual and private basis, whether to relate to it in terms of doctrinal obedience and piety as well (Engelke 2007; Bielo 2009).

contemporary topics such as same-sex marriage, the 'Uberization' of labour, or global warming.

'Radical' recursivity and the 'provincialisation' of one's roots

Les AlterCathos were hyper-alert, recursively, to the political aspects of their own behaviour: in particular, their developing efforts to share their new intellectual framework with others were viewed as a central part of their 'political' engagement. They opened up their meetings to the general public and advertised their talks to growing audiences (it is worth highlighting here that when I refer to '*Les AlterCathos*' in the remainder of this chapter, I continue to mean the founding members, who at this point constituted the association's directing Committee, and not audience members who did not influence the further evolution of the association).

Les AlterCathos set up a contract with a Lyon-based publishing house, *Peuple Libre* ('free people'), itself part of a wider umbrella of publishers focused on religion, spirituality, and youth; they were given editorial control over the creation of an '*AlterCathos* Collection'. They used this platform to increase public awareness of little-known Catholic thinkers: at first, they focused on re-publishing the works of Marxist and Catholic mystic Simone Weil, mandating a philosopher from the Catholic University of Lyon to edit her work into accessible popular content. This endeavour resulted in the publication of two volumes focused on Weil's conception of war (2016) and on her notion of justice and political action (2017). In parallel, *Les AlterCathos* published the proceeds of their conferences on historical forms of Catholic engagement with environmentalism; another aspect of Catholic 'politics' which they found insufficiently available in mainstream literature (de Plunkett 2015; Revol 2015; Richard & Rey 2016).

Les AlterCathos's self-consciousness about their own political valence was particularly expressed through their gradual emancipation from the guidance of Gérard Leval, and their growing insistance on selecting speakers themselves or presenting *topos* autonomously. From an initially passive position as the recipients of the *topo*'s contents, they started to foreground a more dialectic position in the Q&A session after each talk. 'We received knowledge and then we interrogated it,' David describes, before going even further: 'We put to the test the speakers and their forms of wisdom' (*On met à l'épreuve ces gens qui ont une forme de sagesse*). *Les AlterCathos* questioned their invited speakers' own intellectual and religious backgrounds, which might have informed their *topo,* and pursued a self-aware goal of non-

partisan critique, unbiased – they hoped – by the social or party-political background of speakers. This growing critical attitude towards Leval and invited external speakers, rather than fostering a confrontational mindset, rather 'pacified the debate', according to Marie, and 'opened a space for voluntarily re-creating links between people across difference'. Having built up their own 'grid of analysis' based on empirical and doctrinal modes in which Catholics can be 'political', *Les AlterCathos* gradually expanded the topic of their meetings beyond Catholicism, to include empirical politics and political theory more widely. By 'inviting speakers or reading authors who have a different vision' from their own Catholic epistemology, Marie describes, 'we realised and acknowledged that Catholics aren't correct about everything' (*les cathos n'ont pas raison sur tout*). Here Marie pauses to mention their early grappling with Judith Butler on gender theory – 'reading Butler pushed us to interrogate not only her vision, but also Catholics' vision of the world'.

But this recursive willingness for self-critique had an important outcome: given the range of forms of Catholicism they had explored throughout their first year of meetings, *Les AlterCathos* realised that some of their own assumptions, implicitly attributed to 'Catholicism', were instead more contingently derived from their own socio-cultural background. Marie describes this phase with a joint sociological and epistemological assessment:

> We provincialized ourselves (*on s'est décentralisés tous seuls*). We realized that every time we collectively talked about 'Catholics', we really meant Lyonnais Catholics or urban Catholics of a particular type – like ourselves – a wholly bourgeois and hyper-educated sociology, who drown out other Catholic voices.

This was an uncomfortable realisation, according to Marie, because the association's very early premise – escaping two defined tropes of Catholic engagements in French party politics, namely 'pro-life right-wing *cathos de droite* and left-wing *cathos de gauche* who only care about prisons and migrants' – was gradually coming to be replaced by a single hermeneutics of suspicion *vis-à-vis* the right-wing, conservative pole that most *AlterCathos* members had grown up in, and from which they now recognized that they had inherited a particular moral tradition. While they never embraced the opposite position of becoming 'Left-wing Catholics' – since their purpose remained to avoid 'Left/ Right' discourses – they acknowledged that their political beliefs were becoming less liberal and more social. In particular, they developed a marked antipathy towards multinational corporations, especially Amazon, and towards large-scale international trade agreements, such as the Canada-Europe Trade Agreement

under discussion at the time. Such instances of large-scale profit-seeking, detrimental to smaller local businesses, they now saw as incompatible with the Catholic Social Teaching's socio-economic notions of the 'dignity of work', 'universal destination of goods', and 'preferential option for the poor'.

At this stage in the association's life, two of the original twelve members decided to leave the association, embrace their pre-existing political *habitus*, and convert their interest in the political into careers as advisers in the parties for which they had previously held an affinity – one joined the conservative liberal party *UMP*, and the other joined the far-right *Front National*. With hindsight in 2017, Marie commented that the remaining ten members' reaction to this episode had been informed by the two men's respective characters rather than the political parties they had joined. One of them (who rejoined the *UMP*) had praised *Les AlterCathos* for alerting him to the need for reflexivity, which he now hoped to bring to the political party for which his family had long voted. His stance was considered legitimate and productive by the remaining *AlterCathos* members despite their own ongoing efforts to transcend the sphere of party politics. On the other hand, the second drop-out critiqued *Les AlterCathos* for 'hiding' (*mettre à couvert*) a willful 'swing to the Left (*un tournant à gauche*)' under the guise of deconstructing *a priori* assumptions[74].

Several years after the creation of *Les AlterCathos*, one of the founders[75] finally wrote and published a manifesto articulating the methodological middle-ground which he, and the association more widely, had settled on in terms of questioning yet respecting their own socio-cultural backgrounds. In the new perspective he describes, there is a productive political tension between future and past, and between change and grounding, which allows 'radical' political engagements in the double sense of 'new' and of 'rooted' derived from the Latin etymology of *radix*. The book's cover is illustrated by a drawing of a radish on a celadon background, and its title is a pun on radicality and root vegetables: *Radicalisons-nous!*, 'let us radi(sh)calise ourselves!' (Bès 2017). Its first pages decry the Islamic 'radicalism' which

[74] I met this man in 2017: a half-decade after leaving *Les AlterCathos*, his rancour had grown rather than abated, and he regularly posted incendiary commentary about them on Twitter. He once noticed that Marie had retweeted a post using gender-neutral language (*écriture inclusive*), a new form of grammar for the (usually-gendered) French language which was the focus of a growing moral panic during my fieldwork. He then Tweeted that this revealed Marie's, and *Les AlterCathos*'s, 'conversion' to radical Leftist feminism.

[75] In order to protect the original twelve members' anonymity, I will not clarify who among them eventually published the books I cite here, which by necessity include authors' real names.

underpinned the terrorist attacks of 2015 and 2016[76]; the author instead proposes a different vision of the way in which political renewal or 'radicality' can be informed by religious and socio-cultural 'roots':

> We require rootedness to resist the liquefaction of everything that lasts, and radicality to stop the petrification of all that evolves. Each of these two political virtues balances the other. Without the depth of rootedness, radicality is condemned to a surface action and becomes degraded into extremism. Without the vigour of radicality, rootedness is nothing but a shrivelling, a 'stump-ing' which, without light, leads to atrophy. In an increasingly artificial world, *reprendre racines*, re-claiming roots and re-rooting, is not stepping back but continuing to live. (Bès 2017: 16, my translation)

Through its reference to 'roots', the book is situated within the semantic field of conservative (Catholic) spheres[77], yet it exhorts these populations not to essentialise and fetishize roots – as Islamic fundamentalists and rising far-right discourses alike were doing in 2017 (Oliphant 2019). Here, roots are not seen to confer nationalist rights, nor support crusading/jihadist universalist projects, but are viewed instead as a check against 'artificial' lives, a term by which *Les AlterCathos* express an indictment of the liberal and neoliberal economic practices of the wealthy bourgeois spheres they address.

Throughout the half-decade between their creation in 2011 and my fieldwork, *Les AlterCathos* had defined the core modalities of their essence: a redefined epistemological grasp of intellectual, political, and religious 'roots', and a recursive awareness of the 'radicality' of their efforts to be political *as* Catholics in the French secular context and in the neoliberal world. Their mission statement was verbalized in a promise to 'root the political intelligence of the laïety in the social teaching of the Church'[78] – the 'teaching of the Church', here, meaning not only the doctrine of the Vatican, but also the examples and guidance of the Church writ large, incarnated in generations of the faithful (Mayblin 2017; 2019). In Marie's

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[76] A reference which squarely situates the book within the discursive language of French conservative spheres, for whom the terms 'radical' and 'radicalisation' refered exclusively and obsessively to Islamic fundamentalism, rather than to Leftist politics, particularly in the wake of the terror attacks.

[77] Chapter Two discusses the debates about 'Christian roots' (*racines chrétiennes*) which have surrounded evocations of rootedness in France since the early-2000s.

[78] AlterCathos programme 2014-2015, available online: https://www.lesalternativescatholiques.fr/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Programme_AlterCathos_2014-2015.pdf

words, the group therefore allied the strengths of philosophical reflection with the practicality of 'true rootedness (*enracinement*) in real life, that of our predecessors and our own'.

In many ways then, the 'alter' character of *Les AlterCathos* can be compared with that of Left radical activism in substance, in addition to form. Krøijer describes one of the foundational aspirations of Left radical activism as 'the "going to the origin" of widespread values about equality, autonomy, popular participation in democracy and social "spaciousness"' (2015: 4). *Les AlterCathos* also engage in a process of intellectual purification of concepts through their practical efforts to live by them. In turn, the forms taken by each of their activities – publishing, conference-giving, disengaging from party politics, and, as I will discuss below, participating in street protests – are not pre-determined, but instead mediate and manifest their intentions (2015: 6). *Les AlterCathos*'s gradual constitution of a Catholic political epistemology enacted and made visible – including to themselves – the original members' desire for a platform where they could investigate the sociological and epistemological role of (their own) Catholicism in the elaboration of (their own) political beliefs. In turn, this platform allowed them to simultaneously lay claim to and critique their own position as 'Catholics'.

In their reflexivity and recursive hermeneutics of suspicion, *Les AlterCathos*'s meetings are therefore substantively different from the 'philosophical' Catholic conferences described in Chapter Two, despite their close similarities in form once *Les AlterCathos* started opening their meetings to a wider audience. Contrary to *Le Collège Supérieur*, *Les AlterCathos* not only acknowledge their members' and audiences' Catholic background(s), but mobilize it as an epistemic tool. Marie once claimed that these differences afford intellectual and political 'freedom' to *Les AlterCathos*: 'What a joy to be able to say: goodness, Catholics are such idiots about certain things' (*qu'est-ce que les cathos sont cons sur certains trucs*). She smiled and added a caveat: 'Of course, we can't let that develop into a form of scorn or lack of charity'. In these few sentences, Marie showcased her simultaneous ability to distance herself from, yet remain affiliated to, the 'Catholics' she ironically critiqued – here, the bourgeois Lyonnais Catholic spheres in which she was born and still lives. Furthermore, she shows her abiding commitment to Catholic 'charity' not only as a doctrinal imperative, but also as a methodological tool for her (self-)critique.

La Manif Pour Tous: Écologie intégrale 1.0

The year 2013 was decisive in the development of *Les AlterCathos*, who gained visibility during *La Manif Pour Tous* (cf. Chapter One). Like the interlocutors introduced in Chapter Two, *Les AlterCathos* did not oppose the enshrinement in law of same-sex unions but they did take issue with several correlates of the proposed law in terms of parenthood, and they were especially attracted to the prospect of discovering street protests. *Les AlterCathos*'s desire to witness and participate in 'French democracy in action', as Marie later put it, took the form of a zealous effort to 'enrich the debate' and distinguish themselves from protesters who 'only' cared about barring the progress of LGBT+ rights. *Les AlterCathos*'s disregard for other protesters' 'dogmatism'[79] stemmed from a genuine rejection of homophobia but almost more so from distate at what they saw as the latter's lack of intellectual exertion. This, they found incompatible with the gravitas and responsibility which they considered immanent in any participation in governmental or public politics.

Individual members were active in coordinating the logistics of transporting hundreds of Lyonnais protesters to Paris for each major demonstration, and were interviewed on national television coverage of the events[80]. More crucially, several *AlterCathos* members were instrumental in the creation of *Les Veilleurs* ('the watchmen', 'vigils' or 'sentinels'). Having been pressed by the police to leave the *Esplanade des Invalides* after the end of a *Manif* demonstration in Paris, a crowd of protesters spontaneously returned in the evening to sit on the plaza by candlelight. *Les Veilleurs* attracted hundreds of participants and listeners; when riot police were sent to supervise their sit-ins, they responded by singing popular French folk music and the occasional Scout hymn[81]. Following the lead of Parisian acquaintances who

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[79] Referring to these protesters as *dogmatique* was the more polite version, the other being the use of the label *bourrin* – derived from a pejorative term for horses (the equivalent of 'nag') which would best translate as 'oafish'.

[80] One *AlterCathos* founder was on the same team of volunteers as my interlocutors introduced in Chapter One: together, they organised coaches for Lyonnais protesters to travel to Paris. January 10th, 2013: 'Envoyé Spécial: La bataille du mariage pour tous', France 2.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nDCdHaczDM&t=1347s

[81] While the best-known Scouting movements in France are Catholic, not all Scouts are Christian, and indeed not all are religious – Scout hymns were chosen because they signalled protesters' diverse spiritual backgrounds and their attachment to nature and community. The songs were nonetheless perceived as 'Catholic' by external observers unfamiliar with the Scouting world (cf. Chapter One).

were also in their mid-twenties and studying philosophy, literature, or the social sciences, several *AlterCathos* members began taking an active public role among *Les Veilleurs*. During the sit-ins, they read out loud from a wide selection of texts ranging from French literature to international political culture. *Les AlterCathos* found, among the *Veilleurs* sit-ins, a willing and plentiful audience for the reflections they had been honing since the creation of their association in 2011. As a group, *Les Veilleurs* professed the aim of going beyond the single topic of same-sex marriage and parenthood in order to understand, more generally, the political and social contexts in which the 'Marriage for All' law proposal had arisen.

In short, *Les Veilleurs* reproduced the investigative approach that *Les AlterCathos* had developed in Lyon, albeit without the latter's explicit Catholicism and detailed epistemological 'grid of analysis'. However, where *Les AlterCathos*'s 'grid of analysis' was designed to continually allow 'alternative' analyses of contemporary political situations without formulating a single catch-all politics, *Les Veilleurs* had the broader ambition of offering a prescriptive solution to the problem they identified. Honed over the course of months of sit-ins and summarized a year later in a book which proved extremely popular among young *Manif* protesters, *Les Veilleurs*' analysis adopted a deliberately provocative tone and posed the diagnosis that the neoliberal world – particularly under the impetus of the academic and tech sectors in the United States[82] – had, in the name of progress, stopped observing the 'natural limits' of the environment and of the human condition. Their argument pertained to *La Manif* insofar as they argued strongly against surrogacy, but they saw their own efforts as transcending this protest to make environmental and economic points as well: they argued against genetic research, exploitative resource extraction, and generally, any facet of what they saw as the global 'commercialisation of the living' by profit-seeking, monopoly-building corporations – what Douglas Holmes has called 'fast-capitalism' (2000: 9-13).

Les Veilleurs' book, entitled *Our Limits: For An Integral Ecology* (Bès, Durano & Rokvam 2014), instead advocated a 'radical return to sobriety' by acknowledging the frailty of nature

[82] The United States' and, to a lesser extent, the United Kingdom's neoliberal and multicultural traditions are often referred to in France as the 'Anglo-Saxon model', by opposition to the 'French model' of State intervention and Republican universalism (Bowen 2007: 14-15). In this context, there was also a subtext of resentment over the perceived hegemonic growth of 'Anglo-Saxon' progressivism – the years 2012-2013 were marked by a strong rejection of gender studies, *la théorie du 'gender'* (in English in order to reinforce the 'foreign' character of this notion), which the Ministry of Education was attempting to include in reformed teaching materials for pre-school children.

– both human and environmental. The 'integral ecology' they proposed in the title was a call for humanity to 'live simply so that everyone can simply live'; it was an attempt to outline a political and moral economy which would combine 'the absolute respect of human dignity and the preservation of biodiversity' (2014: 11, my translation). But as they set up this overtly anti-liberal political and social project based on 'limits', they hoped that public opinion would distinguish between *their* form of socio-economic conservatism – virtuous because it was intellectually thought-through and designed for the challenges of the 21st century – and the unreflexive conservatism of the rest of *Manif* protesters. In truth, they viewed their own project as progressive rather than strictly conservative – while they retained the cultural 'roots' of French traditionalism which are most often associated with the Right, they advocated an economic stance of antiliberal degrowth (*décroissance*) which would seem radical to those same populations. Their project was therefore rooted yet radical, as described earlier: to their minds, it was 'progressive' in the sense of aiming to better the quality of human life through Left-leaning social economics; 'progressive' in the sense that degrowth can be considered a horizon of improvement for the sake of the planet (Rabhi 2010).

While their book, and the texts read during *Les Veilleurs*' sit-ins more generally, did not explicitly draw on Catholic sources or foreground religious morals, the themes raised nevertheless implicitly appealed to the – largely Catholic – protesters' familiarity with Christian narratives of respect for human dignity in the context of pro-life movements. Instead of having the desired effect of distinguishing *Les Veilleurs* from other *Manif* protesters, however, the pamphlet *Our Limits* was read and cited so widely that it blurred those very lines. The majority of *Manif* protesters continued to focus primarily on human bioethics. While they followed *Les Veilleurs*' impetus to widen the debate beyond the sole topic of same-sex marriage and procreation, they took the conversation in the direction of 'transhumanism', borrowing the language of 'limits' to reject a vast array of research into genomics, human enhancement technologies, and artificial intelligence (Ferry 2016; Hadjadj 2017; Magnin 2017).

Discarding *Les Veilleurs*' original notion of 'integral ecology' associating human and environmental wellbeing, more influential leaders of *La Manif Pour Tous* latched onto the increasingly-popular keyword of ecology to promote a solely anthropocentric vision: coining the term *écologie humaine* or 'human ecology' (Gomez 2013; Derville 2016), they argued that 'human nature' should benefit from the same vigorous conservation efforts that Left-wing environmental activists devote to other endangered species. Ultimately, partisans of *écologie*

humaine returned, albeit under a new label, to the themes which are usually associated with traditional Catholic advocacy (Ginsburg 1998; Paxson 2004; Elisha 2011): in addition to championing male/female biological alterity, the gender binary, and heterosexual procreation, *écologie humaine* came to encompass the rejection of abortion and euthanasia. After *Les Veilleurs* – and through them, *Les AlterCathos* – had introduced the topic of ecology into the debate, it was thus emptied of the environmental and political-economic substance which it had originally indexed. Instead of 'renovating' the Catholic approach to protest and political reflection, the language of ecology allowed traditional actors to consolidate their existing stances, and created bitter divisions between proponents of '*écologie humaine*' and '*écologie intégrale*' – while, on the surface, refracting virtually indistinguishable images of anti-liberal and conservative Catholicism.

Overall, when looking back to the period of *La Manif*, it is not helpful to try to distinguish how much or how little of *Les Veilleurs*'s paradigm of *écologie intégrale* was owed to or desired by their few *AlterCathos* members. What does matter is the way in which *Les AlterCathos* participated in the fusions and fissions taking place among *Manif* participants during the year-long span of the protest (Krøijer 2015: 11, cf. Evans-Pritchard 1940: 147). Fusing with *Les Veilleurs* on the basis of a shared commitment to investigating large-scale political theory, and rejecting affiliation with other protesters they found too unreflexive, consolidated *Les AlterCathos*'s reputation among *Manif* protesters and Lyonnais Catholic spheres. More critically, they took a clear stance in the fission between two moral and political discourses about 'ecology'. During this phase, in Marie's words, *Les AlterCathos* operated '*une montée en généralité*', a processual notion which is difficult to translate into English – they operated a 'rise to a higher order of generalization'. Drawn from French sociologists Boltanski & Thévenot's theory of 'justification' (2006 [1991]), Marie's use of the concept of *montée en généralité* refers to the crystallization of ideological paradigms, and once again offers an emic parallel to Krøijer's argument that political practice gives 'determinate form to the indeterminate' (2015: 12). The notion of *montée en généralité* indexes the simplification and streamlining of a paradigm in view of, and as a result of, being grasped by a larger audience. As Marie sees it, both paradigms of *écologie humaine* and *écologie intégrale* underwent a crystallization in the latter months of *La Manif*; two respective *montées en généralité* which were in part driven by their mutual antagonism and 'denied ressemblance' (cf. Harrison 2003). In other words, whereas *Les AlterCathos* had, before *La Manif*, been 'alternative' primarily in their use of a new Catholic political epistemology to

analyse contemporary politics, after *La Manif* they crystallized not only as a visible actor in Catholic spheres, but as an ideologically-marked actor, defined by the prescriptive socio-economic and environmental 'grand scheme' of *écologie intégrale* (cf. Schielke & Debevec 2012).

Conclusion: *Écologie intégrale* 2.0 after *Laudato Si'*

Les AlterCathos's newfound popularity after *La Manif* proved problematic for their Committee, who doubted their new followers' comprehension of the association's aims – in 2013 or 2014, uninitiated audiences tended to confuse and conflate *écologie intégrale* and *écologie humaine*, and assumed that *Les AlterCathos*'s main goal was to continue lobbying against same-sex-marriage after the original *Manif* movement died down. 'It was a true launching moment for us,' explained Raphaël in 2016,

> but we knew that a lot of people who jumped on the *AlterCathos* bandwagon actually thought that we would be going in a totally different direction from what we truly were doing. We figured that those people would shake loose gradually. But it's frightening, in a way: I look at the original Twitter account we opened back then, and out of the 1500 followers from that period, 1499 are extremist Catholic identitarians two years later (*1499 sont des cathos extrémistes identitaires deux ans plus tard*).

During the year 2014-2015, Les AlterCathos devoted their conference programme to what they saw as the basic elements of their thought, in order to instruct their new audiences – by doubling down on their 'teaching' mission, they further solidified these elements into a fixed paradigm rather than only a flexible epistemology. The year started with six conferences on 'Political Culture', split into a first trio of talks asking 'Can we have faith in party politics?' and another asking 'Can we have faith in participatory democracy?'. This was followed by nine talks on 'Political thoughts of Catholics' and nine on 'The Church Social Teaching for dummies' – the bread and butter of their initial 'grid of analysis'. Reflecting the association's evolution throughout its contact with *Les Veilleurs*, the conference programme also included four sessions on ecology, introducing the environmental and economic facets of *écologie intégrale*.

Mere days after the final conference of the year, mid-June 2015, came the publication of Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. While not all encyclicals address social matters, *Laudato Si'* was advertised as a new addition to the Church

Social Teaching concerning poverty and the environment. David, Marie, and other key *AlterCathos* members read it immediately, given its clear synergies with their existing engagement with the CST and ecology. Relating this event to me, they each expressed having felt a deep sense of vindication: indeed, Pope Francis's eagerly-awaited encyclical proved to advocate, specifically, an 'integral ecology' (original Latin: *integra oecologia*, French: *écologie intégrale*; 2015: §137-§162). In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis argues that 'everything is connected'; that there exists a synergy between climate change and global inequality, both of which are driven and perpetuated by global capitalist systems prioritising technocratic expansion and financial profit over the 'Common Good'. It is a strikingly similar argument to that made by *Les Veilleurs* in their earlier manifesto (Bès *et al* 2014), albeit with a global rather than national scale of analysis, the addition of thorough theological and scientific foundations, and an optimistic rather than provocative tone when calling for change going forward. The 'integral ecology' advocated by Francis in response to climate change and global inequality is therefore 'integral' in that it takes into account the entirety of the planet and its people, and 'ecological', rather than merely environmental, in that it addresses the links and interconnections between all the parts of this whole.

Francis pitches his 'integral ecology' against two strands of existing activism: most obviously, the biocentric, Malthusian proponents of population control, who prioritise the environment over humanity, and more subtly, the tendency of his own Catholic flock to view the safekeeping of humanity as merely a matter of pro-life activism, too often without regard for social inequalities or the protection of the planet (2015: §49-50) – a firm indictment of the champions of *écologie humaine*, in the minds of *Les AlterCathos*. To both traditions, Francis opposes that 'we have to realize that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*' (2015: §49, original emphasis).

Les AlterCathos gave a central place to *Laudato Si'* in their conference programme for the following year (2015-2016), with a series of conferences titled 'Ecology according to *Laudato Si*' and another cycle called 'Responding to the call of *Laudato Si*'. The talks did not address the entirety of *Laudato Si'*: leaving aside its theological chapters[83], they referenced the sections which more closely aligned with their prior interests – 'Chapter One: What Is

[83] 'Chapter Two: The Gospel of Creation' (Pope Francis 2015: §62-§100), and 'Chapter Six: Ecological Education and Spirituality' (*ibid.* §202-§246).

Happening With Our Common Home' (§17-§61) which highlights 'pollution and climate change, 'the issue of water', the 'loss of biodiversity', the 'decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society', and 'global inequality'; Chapter Two on 'The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis' (§101-§136), which critiques globalization and the technocratic paradigm; Chapter Three on 'Integral Ecology' (§137-§162), and finally the section on 'politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfillment' within 'Chapter Five: Lines of Approach and Action' (§163-§201). In short, where the year 2014-2015 had been devoted by *Les AlterCathos* to 'teaching' conservative Catholic audiences key concepts from the history of Catholic politics and from the Church Social Teaching, in order that they may question 'how to be political as Catholics' in the contemporary world, the year 2015-2016 gave the answer wholesale: by following *écologie intégrale* and *Laudato Si*'. Following the *montée en généralité* – the paradigmatic generalization – by which *Les AlterCathos* had defined their own political-economic version of *écologie intégrale* up to 2015, the publication of *Laudato Si'* allowed a second layer of crystallization, this time expressly tying *écologie intégrale* to religion and normative doctrine.

I might have started this chapter's discussion there: asking, like Eric Hoenes del Pinal's study of the reception of *Laudato Si'* in the Verapaz, 'how translocal Roman Catholic doctrines become localized in the life-worlds of specific Catholic communities' (2019: 293). But I suggest that in this particular case, the usual direction of the 'flow' of Catholic 'ideas, discourses, and symbols' (*ibid.*) – from the translocal to the local, from the Church to the laiety, from Rome to Lyon – was inverted in my interlocutors' eyes. Indeed, they saw their pre-existing commitment to ecology as a way of 'doing politics as Catholics' become a global Catholic proposition thanks to Francis's intervention. They considered that their national conflict against the more traditionalist partisans of *écologie humaine* was 'resolved' through the – unwitting and coincidental – arbitration of the Pope; and that their local efforts to 'be alternative' and 'renovate society' among their largely Right-wing, bourgeois Catholic background was likewise vindicated. *Laudato Si'* was hailed across the world as a radically new direction on the part of the Papacy, who had never before addressed environmentalism, or been so categorical in dispensing political and economic advice – but as far as *Les AlterCathos* were concerned, the contents of *Laudato Si'* were a confirmation of their own attempts at 'radicality' since 2011.

Launching Part Two's exploration of the praxis of *écologie intégrale*, this chapter has shown how the paradigm was developed into a religious 'grand scheme' by a particular group

of Lyonnais Catholics who granted it epistemological coherence and imbued it with objective (Papal) power (cf. Schielke & Debevec 2012: 7). It has argued that *écologie intégrale* is a 'radical' new Catholic politics: it is supported by a 'rooted' Catholic political epistemology, and it advocates a non-partisan, social, and green avenue of political action. In so doing, it both finds value in the sociological milieu from which *Les AlterCathos* originate – the conservative Catholic bourgeoisie of Lyon remains their 'roots' – and challenges this population's previous political practices. This political epistemology is intended to guide conservative Catholics through a process of intellectual, cultural, and social change, much like the theory of cultural change described by Joel Robbins (2004): taking as its starting point French Catholics' recent rise in interest for politics, epitomised by *La Manif Pour Tous*, it gradually moves away from Right-wing party politics and traditional bioethical commitments, towards a vision of politics which no longer prioritizes statecraft, but instead promotes green and social action in daily life. The next chapter will now turn precisely to action: it will explore how *Les AlterCathos* put *écologie intégrale* into practice in their café, newly-opened in 2016; and it will address the ways in which *Les AlterCathos* include lapsed Catholics and non-Catholics in their applications of this religious 'grand scheme'.

CHAPTER FOUR

Putting *Écologie Intégrale* Into Practice

Or, Does Piety Matter in a World-Oriented Religious Ethic?

This chapter explores how *Les Alternatives Catholiques* put into practice the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* – their new vision of Catholic politics, elaborated in the previous chapter – in the space of their café '*Le Simone*'. It argues that *Les AlterCathos*'s efforts to instantiate *écologie intégrale* and transmit it to new audiences creates but also manages a tension between 'ethics of efficacy' and 'ethics of conviction' in *Le Simone*. Contributing to Part Two's investigation of the rise of this new Catholic political theology, this chapter aims to go beyond 'piety' in the study of religious actors' imagination and curation of 'good worlds'.

Introduction

Les Alternatives Catholiques inaugurated their café on April 1st, 2016. Named *Le Simone* in homage to 1940s philosopher and Catholic mystic Simone Weil, the café was intended as a space in which *Les AlterCathos* could put into application the green and social paradigm of *écologie intégrale*, which had so far remained a more theoretical, esoteric object of discussion among the association's Committee and during the association's evening conferences[84]. For

[84] See Chapter Three. The paradigm of *écologie intégrale* was developed by the founders – now Committee members – of *Les AlterCathos* in a bid to 'be political *as* Catholics', albeit in a different manner than their largely Right-wing background. Inspired by the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, by the recently-published Papal encyclical *Laudato Si'*, but also by the practical example of historical Catholic figures such as

the first six months of the café's existence, its walls were decorated with large, vividly yellow posters detailing Simone Weil's life: her tenure as a philosophy teacher in France, her investment in anti-fascist political activism, her participation in the Anarchist columns during the Spanish Civil War, her ecstatic conversion to Catholicism, and finally her relocation to London during World War II where she supported the French Resistance while working as a factory hand. Although 'Simone', as she was affectionately known by the first café regulars, had never written about environmentalism or about the Church Social Teaching, she served as a mascot representing several of *Les AlterCathos*'s core aspirations: a strong sense of personal engagement, a passion for philosophy and politics, an alertness to the importance of labour and community roots, and through it all, an attachment to Catholicism.

Le Simone was opened firstly with a practical goal in mind: it serves as a locale for *Les AlterCathos*'s evening conferences, which had until then been held in rooms rented or borrowed from Catholic associations and schools across Lyon. Several of these other Catholic actors contributed to the initial fundraising[85] for the opening of *Le Simone*: among them were the diocese's cultural fund, the *Fondation Saint-Irénée*; the *Collège Supérieur* (Chapter Two); and also a collective of donors from the *grandes familles lyonnaises* and *grands patrons*, the longstanding Catholic high society and entrepreneurs of Lyon (Chapter One). Amid this well-established, largely conservative Catholic network, *Les AlterCathos* consider that *Le Simone* has a further, more militant goal beyond hosting their conferences: its aim is to promote *écologie intégrale* on a daily basis within one of the most traditional Catholic neighbourhoods in town. Broadly speaking, this is the present chapter's ethnographic focus: how *Les AlterCathos* put *écologie intégrale* into practice in *Le Simone*.

To the founding members of *Les AlterCathos*, putting *écologie intégrale* into practice can only be a bottom-up process driven by a growing number of invested members, rather than one coordinated centrally by themselves. As the *AlterCathos* President, David Coureau, summarized it during an 'open consultation' event a year after the opening of *Le Simone*,

> At first, we were an association of intellectuals holding conferences, but we came to realise we must lay down concrete actions. *Le Simone* was imagined as a place which

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Simone Weil, the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* is in equal measures green and social. It associates the welfare of the planet with the welfare of mankind.

[85] After this initial fundraising, *Le Simone* was financially independent – and also independent in its development.

> could incarnate three elements: life, reflection, and labour. Without life, intellectual discipline becomes dry, and so does the rigour of labour. We need to ensure that life persists, and indeed, there *is* a vitality in this place, which wasn't guaranteed when we launched.

In order to sustain the 'vitality' of *Le Simone*, *Les AlterCathos* welcome participation, in the form of 'life, reflection, and labour', from all comers – neighbourhood locals, café regulars, and members of the traditional Catholic spheres. The daily life of *Le Simone* is run in a decentralised way, whereby the Committee encourage newcomers to host events and activities within the space, and do not much police independent initiatives once they have been launched: the atmosphere is both 'do it yourself' and, with some limits which I will address in this chapter, 'live and let live'.

'We, the founding members, our specialty is intellectual activity,' David explained,

> and that's why we insist on the brisk rhythm of the conferences. Every Wednesday, at the very least – when the rhythm disappears, so does the vitality. That's what *we* can bring to the rest of you; and what you can contribute is perhaps something different. If you have an idea, come and tell us "I'm going to do this". We're not here to give you permission – at worst we'll tell you it sounds unreasonable. Most of all, we're not here to run it for you.

Marie Sève, a Vice-President of *Les AlterCathos*, later explained to me that she heard in David's speech a welcoming attitude, granting audience members the freedom to use *Le Simone* as a 'laboratory' (*un laboratoire*) for the development of initiatives. More familiar with the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* than I, Marie pointed out some of its central tenets between the lines of David's speech: 'life, reflection, and labour' are cornerstones of 'human dignity' and of the 'dignity of work' according to the Church Social Teaching (Pope Pius XI 1931); and David's foregrounding of 'collective life' was a conscious attack both against neoliberal individualism and against alienating bureaucratic or corporate organisations. Rather than centralising the running of *Le Simone* into the hands of the *AlterCathos* Committee, therefore, Marie considered that the inclusion of new members into this collective 'vitality', regardless of their religious, academic, or social background, would create a 'Common Good' (*Bien Commun*). This, in turn, corresponds to *Les AlterCathos*'s conception of political engagement, embodied in everyday life as a form of prefigurative politics (Chapter Three; Krøijer 2015).

If the previous chapter explored the epistemological set-up of *écologie intégrale*, this chapter follows by addressing its practical instantiation – the 'everyday practice' of last chapter's 'grand scheme' (cf. Schielke & Debevec 2012). In Chapter Three, I argued that *écologie intégrale* – as an intellectual paradigm – relies on a new vision of the articulation of 'roots' and 'radicality', whereby one's roots, such as Catholic, national, and local traditions, are both valued and transcended in service of a new, 'radical', social and green outlook. In this chapter, I will show that the renewal of roots plays a part in the way newcomers are gradually introduced to *écologie intégrale* in *Le Simone*, as the décor of the café both draws on, and 'makes strange', the visual codes of Catholic spaces. I will explore how the decentralised 'vitality' of *Le Simone* draws newcomers – both Catholic and not – into the efforts of community-building and green practices prescribed by *écologie intégrale*; albeit with two possible stumbling blocks. Indeed, there is a first tension between *Les AlterCathos*'s wish that *Le Simone* should be run as a decentralised, grassroots operation, and their desire that it should nevertheless evolve in a precise direction, that of *écologie intégrale*. The second source of tension is embedded in the first, and concerns the intended audience of *Le Simone*: ostensibly a neighbourhood café, welcoming all newcomers to become invested in the daily life of the space, the question eventually arises of whether it matters that participants should actually be *Catholic*.

Recent work in the anthropology of ethics has drawn a contrast between 'world-oriented' and 'I-oriented' teleologies (Mattingly 2014). In a 'world-oriented' ethical project, 'the social world is neither residual nor ancillary to the self, but is itself the purpose of moral judgement and action' (Piliavsky & Sbriccoli 2016 : 376). I argue that *écologie intégrale* is one such world-oriented project, whose judgment and action are directed towards the care of the planet and the care of its people – the 'care for our common home', to paraphrase the subtitle of the encyclical *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis 2015). As Raphaël Saônat, another Vice-President of *Les AlterCathos*, put it, '*Écologie intégrale* is not dogmatic':

> Instead of having a set of fixed foundations from which are directly derived actions, there is an inversion: *Laudato Si'* allows you to think about a social observation, about the goal you are searching for, and from there you can backtrack and find in the Social Doctrine the guidelines […[86]] which are most appropriate.

[86] Here Raphaël cites 'subsidiarity' as one such guideline. Subsidiarity will be the focus of the next chapter.

Following the example of one of his Papal predecessors (Pope John XXIII 1963), Pope Francis chooses to dedicate *Laudato Si'* 'to the entire Catholic world' and 'to all men and women of good will', but even further, Francis writes, 'I wish to address every person living on this planet' (2015: §3). As an outcome-driven, 'world-oriented' project, therefore, *Les AlterCathos* consider that anyone can participate in *écologie intégrale*. As David Coureau sees it,

> If Catholics and non-Catholics agree on the goals they are searching for, which seems to me to be the case in *Le Simone* with regards to climate change and global inequality, then *Les AlterCathos*'s reading of *Laudato Si'* offers in answer a Catholic discourse which is acceptable to non-Catholics.

From the perspective of *Les AlterCathos*'s Committee, putting *écologie intégrale* into practice in *Le Simone* is not a project of evangelisation, and does not rely on participants' own Catholic faith. These premises support the 'do it yourself' atmosphere they foster in *Le Simone*: the Committee's concern is with the outcomes of new initiatives launched by regulars, which should contribute to the green and social character of the café, rather than with the initiators' personal beliefs. However, David or Raphaël's capacity to discursively parse out the place of faith and action in *écologie intégrale* comes from their own in-depth understanding of the logical mechanisms of the paradigm, borne out of years of intellectual engagement with it – while newcomers to *Le Simone* are only just discovering it. As I will show in this chapter, the regulars of *Le Simone* – who include pious, lapsed, and non-Catholics (cf. Mayblin 2017) – find themselves questioning whether and to what extent Catholic faith is a prerequisite to participate in *écologie intégrale*.

I will therefore argue that there exists a tension in the daily running of *Le Simone* between ethics of efficacy (Piliavsky & Sbriccoli 2016) – the idea that 'getting things done' (*ibid.*: 2) matters more than underlying reasonings or the virtues of individual actors – and what I will call 'ethics of conviction', where it matters most that these actions are done *for a reason*, and that individual actors are alert to, articulate about, and committed to the environmental, political, and Catholic moral traditions undergirding their actions. In other words, the tension – both ethnographic and analytical – lies between two possible understandings of what is entailed in 'putting a Catholic discourse into practice': an efficacy-oriented view deems the whole project to be 'Catholic' so long as its desired outcomes are instantiated, while a conviction-oriented view holds that one must *be* Catholic in order to *act* in a Catholic manner.

This equivocity speaks to a long-standing conundrum in the anthropology of religious 'legal, medical and political practices' (Asad 1993: 124), that Talal Asad identified and critiqued as anthropologists' social-scientific tendency to view our role as 'identifying what part of it is "true religion"' (*ibid*.). Indeed, it would be tempting to ask what part of *écologie intégrale* is 'true' Catholicism – much as the regulars of *Le Simone* ask themselves – and to answer this question on the basis of *Simone* members' piety, lapsedness, or lack of faith. Taking on board Asad's critique, however, I do not highlight *Simone* members' diverse relationships with the Catholic faith with the intent to emit an assessment of *écologie intégrale*'s true or partial 'Catholicism' – my aim is to flip the question around. What analytical spaces are opened up if we take as a starting point *Les AlterCathos*'s and *Laudato Si'*s initial assertion that *écologie intégrale* is Catholic? It is here that the concern of this chapter, namely the practical instantiation of *écologie intégrale*, rejoins the broader concern of this thesis with forms of Catholic political theology. I will argue that viewing *écologie intégrale*, and political theologies more widely, as 'world-oriented religious ethics', grants the analytical flexibility to address emic negotiations about whether faith and piety *matter* in religious projects – without assuming that a praxis is religious only in proportion to its piety.

Le Simone – a logistical introduction

Le Simone is situated in the family-oriented and traditionally Catholic district of Ainay, at a slight distance from the truly-fashionable and touristy centre of Lyon. Within Ainay, the café is itself a few streets removed from the busy but aging neighbourhood high-street, with its chain-store clothing retailers, chain-store sandwich bars, and independent but grubby antique dealers. The area used to be the home of the Lyonnais aristocracy, and then of the city's *grande bourgeoisie* in the 19th-century; its main thoroughfare and commercial hub, the *rue Victor-Hugo*, was one of the very first to be pedestrianised in the mid-1970s – marking the last significant renovation of the neighbourhood, which has since become gently shabby. The areas immediately to the north and south of Ainay along the *Presqu'Île* – the tapered peninsula between the parallel Rhône and Saône rivers – have been the focus of extensive development in the past ten years: to the north lies the centre of town with its fast-developing luxury and tourist industries, and to the south, a new residential quarter with a giant shopping centre is emerging where the old industrial docks used to be. Ainay, in the middle, is much more sedate; most Lyonnais only ever transit through it on their way to the train station or the Catholic University, which together mark the southernmost boundary of the neighbourhood.

But in 2016, the opening of *Le Simone* joined a nascent wave of community-led rejuvenation. Amid the deteriorating fast-fashion and fast-food outlets which had been the neighbourhood's pride back in the early decades of mass-market consumerism, and against the fast-paced transformation of the city to the north and south, a younger demographic of Ainay locals started launching independent businesses geared towards 'authentic', green-minded, neighbourly living. It is in the narrow backstreets running parallel to the central *rue Victor-Hugo*, hemmed on either side by the two rivers, that local residents now look for newly-opened cafés and small restaurants, tiny clothing stores and art boutiques, bookshops – rejoining the Christian bookstores already peppering the area – artisan *boulangeries* and butchers', as well as a wholesale, plastic-free grocery store.

Le Simone was likewise opened by locals, for locals: Marie Sève lives five minutes away on foot, as does David Coureau with his wife and three young children. *Le Simone* occupies a large street-front space, relative to the neighbourhood's generally small stores: its disused premises were renovated by hand by *Les AlterCathos* to spare costs. They partitioned the lot into two spaces: a café and a larger area destined to become a coworking space, a shared workplace with monthly desk rentals. The café side of the business guaranteed a stream of passersby while the coworking side would allow the consolidation of a core group of daily visitors; helping to advertise *Les AlterCathos* and hopefully attracting new audiences to the conferences held after hours in either the café or coworking spaces.

When *Les AlterCathos* first discussed opening a street-front business, they considered how the practicalities and logistics of such an undertaking might be made to conform to *écologie intégrale*. It was agreed that the café would serve only locally-sourced and preferably organic products; it was decided that prices would be kept low and profit avoided; and more profoundly, it was determined that the coworking side should offer an affordable gathering space to self-employed or telecommuting young professionals, who might be precarious or isolated. In theory therefore, *Le Simone* would serve the Common Good by being environmentally-friendly and promoting 'human dignity' – a pillar of the Catholic Social Teaching – both by creating a neighbourly space of belonging and by fostering the 'dignity of work'[87] – another pillar of the CST and key element of Simone Weil's philosophy. In practice

[87] While the notion of 'dignity of work' in the Church Social Doctrine initially concerned the 19th and 20th-century industrial working classes, *Les AlterCathos* consider that it also applies today to precarious workers in alienating gig economies, including in competitive white-collar service jobs. Pragmatically, *Les AlterCathos* considered that they could not be of much help to blue-collar workers, since the café is located in a central and

however, these carefully-reasoned plans were only clearly articulated among, and understood by, the philosophers of the *AlterCathos* Committee. When I first visited *Le Simone*'s café in the winter of 2016, six months after its opening, and gained membership to the coworking space in January 2017, the café's two part-time salaried managers – neither of whom were *AlterCathos* Committee members prior to taking on this executive role – its team of volunteer baristas, and its still-developing group of local regulars, were focused on the day-to-day logistics of launching a new business, and had only a surface awareness of the 'green and Catholic' project (*écolo catho*) underpinning the creation of *Le Simone*.

When I started my fieldwork in *Le Simone*, large posters on the walls described the life of Simone Weil, and explained how her philosophical work and political engagements had encouraged *Les AlterCathos* to open this café. At the time, I did not realise how lucky I was to see this spelled out – the posters were taken down shortly thereafter, and the walls of *Le Simone* have since served as gallery space for little-known or local artists to expose their work. For the first six months of the café's existence, curious passersby pushing the door had a chance to read about the purpose behind *Le Simone* – that the café is run by a Catholic association committed to environmental action and community-building – but nowadays, newcomers are left guessing. The majority of customers are neighbourhood inhabitants – middle- to upper-class, largely traditional in their dress and behaviour – as well as students and professors from the nearby Catholic University of Lyon (*UCLy*) and members of the wider Lyonnais *cathosphère*[88]. A smaller but nonetheless regular proportion of café clients is composed of construction workers from the building sites south of Ainay, who pop into *Le Simone* for cheap espressos and quick chats with the friendly baristas.

Whether they visit once or daily, *Simone* customers must sign up as 'members': indeed, the café is run according to the legal provision for 'associative cafés' (*café associatif*), which can only serve association members. This legal setup has several benefits: opening hours and prices are flexible and do not submit to trade-competition regulations; and while *Le Simone* is not licensed for hard liquor, it can still serve wine and beer. Signing up for membership is a formality: a 0.10€ charge is added to new clients' first bill, who are asked to input their email address onto the membership roll. On this occasion, baristas are supposed to mention *Les*

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well-to-do neighbourhood of Lyon; so taking a concern for isolated or precarious white-collar professionals was a compromise of sorts.

[88] See Thesis Introduction for a sociological description of the *cathosphère*.

AlterCathos – as the associative body running *Le Simone* – and offer a booklet with the year's conference programme. In practice, they only do so when they remember to, and there is no queue waiting to be served – but these conversations between baristas and customers form a successful advertising platform for the association. All new members are automatically signed up for *Les AlterCathos*'s monthly email newsletter: by this definition, *Les AlterCathos* gathered 3,000 'members' by the end of my fieldwork, a year and a half after the opening of *Le Simone*. This chapter refers more realistically to 250 or so *Simone* 'regulars', who include the Committee of *Les AlterCathos*, composed of around 25 members of varying dedication; a dozen volunteer baristas who hold an intermediate position half-in and half-out of the Committee; 40 or so coworking space members, who are not necessarily local to the neighbourhood or indeed Catholic; a crowd of regular participants in the diversity of events, workshops, and conferences hosted in *Le Simone* in the evenings and at the weekend; and finally, a friendly collection of recurring customers such as the construction workers or the employees of the nearby dance studio who primarily take an interest in the café *qua* café, rather than in the rest of the association's events.

Le Simone – a conceptual (albeit equivocal) introduction

In Chapter Three, I addressed *Les AlterCathos*'s conferences, which introduce growing audiences to the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* in an explicit and intellectual way. The café *Le Simone* has, since 2016, been intended as a practical and everyday means to discover *écologie intégrale* outside of the conference setting. But how can a space introduce a paradigm? In this section, I show that *Le Simone* has an equivocal décor, based on hints and irony. Visual hooks draw on Catholic, green, and local cultural 'roots', but do not clearly spell out the tenets of *écologie intégrale*. This equivocal décor, initially accidental and now intentional, induces newcomers into asking questions and becoming involved in *Le Simone*'s activities. It therefore serves the purpose of community-building, which is in and of itself one of the aims of *écologie intégrale*. It is also a first instance of the tension discussed throughout this chapter, between efficacy – here, running a café *qua* café, and decorating the space without reflecting at first on the decorations' meaning – and conviction, as the café's haphazard décor becomes retroactively 'justified' in terms of ecology and Catholicism.

No *Simone* customer is ever asked whether they are Catholic when baristas sign them up for membership upon their first visit and introduce them to *Les AlterCathos*. The question would be inappropriate in social life in general and even more so in a business context.

Nonetheless, it is also because of the retail setting that these conversations between strangers are possible at all; and it is over the course of discussing a third party – the association *Les AlterCathos* – that a mutual introduction occurs between customers and *Le Simone*, embodied in the person of the barista. Indeed, clients who mention having heard about *Les AlterCathos* previously implicitly hint at their own social background, very likely tied to the elite private schools described in Chapter Two, and therefore, very likely Catholic. Mutual acquaintances might be pinpointed, who might have recommended that these new clients visit *Le Simone*. Other customers are surprised, and express interest – the assumption that they might be Catholic but perhaps from a different social milieu is left unsaid. These conversations, at first glance, resemble 'anonymous introductions' (Candea 2010b) which establish connections rather than identities. Key personal information is momentarily bracketed off – names are not exchanged, and Catholicism is not addressed directly – until such a time as underlying 'mutual possessions' of acquaintances, backgrounds, and interests are revealed (cf. Tarde 1999 [1895]: 86; in Candea 2010b: 125). In Matei Candea's case study among Corsican villagers, 'anonymous introductions' serve to hold in abeyance the disconnections between strangers: rather than acknowledging that one does not *know* one's interlocutor by asking for their identity point-blank, the exploration of pre-existing connections 'pre-empt the direct opposition between self and other' (Candea 2010b: 130). In *Le Simone*, there are rare occasions when new clients express disquiet – worry or annoyance – when they are told about *Les AlterCathos*. Stating that they, themselves, are *not* Catholic, these clients return to an identity-based – and oppositional – introduction to question whether they belong in the café[89]. When such explicit disconnections are established, however, the baristas assure clients that they are more than welcome: the café is a public space, baristas will insist, before suggesting that among the diversity of events held within *Le Simone*, perhaps one – other than the Catholic conferences – might interest the newcomers after all.

And there are many events in *Le Simone*. The glass front door of the café is covered in a multitude of colourful Scotch-taped A4 posters, advertisements for the near future or left over from the recent past. Inside the café, a narrow room with a spare, modern aesthetic, visitors

[89] I have never known a café customer to refuse to be added to *Le Simone*'s membership: while a few have made clear that they would unsubscribe from the email newsletter, they have not found this to be an impediment to having a one-off meal or coffee. However, in one case, a prospective coworking member – i.e. someone whose visit would not be one-off but long-term – decided not to join *Le Simone* after all, as she did not want her monetary contribution (the monthly coworking subscription) to finance Catholic conferences.

will find that the posters continue on a large cork board next to the small counter. Most of the flyers concern the conferences run weekly or twice-weekly by *Les AlterCathos*, but there is a profusion of other events on offer. To new arrivals, it is not immediately clear why a café should also offer poetry evenings and folk dances on an irregular basis, or a weekly comic-drawing workshop, or a vegetable collection point. Some new arrivals also express doubt as to what, exactly, is the main financial priority for *Le Simone*: while a portable billboard on the pavement advertises sandwiches, those run out mid-lunch rush more often than not, leaving only a small selection of coffees, teas, and bottled beers. The counter next to the (empty) sandwich fridge is cluttered with home-printed copies of the café's own newspaper – a scrawled Post-It indicates '2€ for the monthly revolutionary Lyonnais Catholic broadsheet!'. It may seem odd for a café to have a monthly paper, but since it does, it may in turn seem odd that the 'monthly' paper is systematically a season out of date – it hardly sets itself up as a sound business or editorial plan. Overall, *Le Simone* is peculiar in that it gives off a first impression of calm and harmony – seen from the street through broad windows, the white walls, light wooden furniture and tall plants create an attractively serene atmosphere – which is immediately belied by the haphazard, lived-in feel of the place at second glance. Layered across the clean, sophisticated décor are a profusion of eclectic add-ons: a goldfish tank labelled 'Sushi – 2€', for instance, or a tip jar labelled 'democratips', with two coin slots encouraging customers to arbitrate between *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings*. By the time customers have noticed that every sandwich on the menu is named after local football stars or Catholic Popes, and spotted the bookshelf filled with political texts and children's colouring books, they might have developed the impression that a great many things are run at once in *Le Simone*, but not always fully or coherently.

Customers might not be aware of the existence of the much larger coworking space next door to the café; they might notice, however, a number of smartly-dressed young men and women in their late-twenties and thirties walking into *Le Simone* with a cheerful hello to the barista, heading straight to the door marked 'loo', and never reappearing. In fact, there is a tiny, dark, windowless room behind that door: it holds a cramped kitchenette and three more doors, two of which open onto toilet stalls and the third marked 'no access'. This one leads into the coworking, a bright, spacious, and high-ceilinged room with a mezzanine and the same modern and plant-filled aesthetic as the café. Once again, first and second impressions clash: the decorating scheme may be airy and fashionable, but the low bookshelf is filled with zombie-themed board games, comic books and toy cap-guns. Likewise, the young

professionals typing away at their laptops seem studious, but a peek at their computer screens might reveal that several of them are engaged in a multiplayer round of the first-person shooter game *Counter-Strike*.

In short, neither the café nor the coworking space quite look like one might expect a 'Catholic space' to look. While there are signs of Catholicism, many of them seem to be an after-thought or even ironic: there is a foot-tall, plain wooden cross on the café counter, but it is propped behind the coffee grinder and partially hidden by the music speakers. In the winter there are Christmas trees in the café and in the coworking space, but they are decorated with handmade cardboard ornaments cut out of egg boxes and loo rolls – the tree in the coworking is topped by a beer bottle spray-painted gold in lieu of a star. Finally, on the café bookshelf, there is a framed A4-size image of Pope Francis – but rather than a traditional devotional memento, it is a cartoon depiction of Francis in a neon-green cassock and zucchetto[90], angrily brandishing a stone tablet inscribed with '**THOU SHALT NOT POLLUTE**' (*tu ne pollueras point*), cut out from the front page of left-wing newspaper *Libération*. The cartoon, dated mid-June 2015, not only parodies the Ten Commandments but evokes the terrorist attacks of January 2015 in Paris, after the satirical left-wing newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* published caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. In the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting, cartoon depictions of religious figures were intended as deliberate expressions of journalistic free speech, against accusations of blasphemy (Favret-Saada 2017: 475*ff*). As an ornament for *Le Simone*, this framed portrait of an irate green Pope Francis – parodic at best, blasphemous at worst – can therefore seem ambiguous, to say the least. In other words, even customers who had, upon first discovering *Le Simone*, established 'connection' and belonging on the basis of mutual acquaintances, a shared social milieu, or a shared interest in the premise of a Catholic café, eventually reach a stage of confusion or incomprehension. The sense of disconnection acknowledged immediately by newcomers who state that they are *not* Catholic, occurs later down the line for the majority of customers whose knowledge of Catholic traditions and doctrine only goes so far in explicating the functioning of *Le Simone*.

Visitors are encouraged to view the decoration and organisation of *Le Simone* as purposeful – the playful eclecticism is clearly not arbitrary – but the purpose is far from transparent. If anything, the most explicit elements, which suggest a Catholic politics – the 'revolutionary'

[90] The hemispherical skull-cap worn by Catholic clerics. Its colour – never green – denotes the cleric's rank; the Pope and Pope emeritus wear white cassocks and zucchetti.

Lyonnais Catholic broadsheet on the counter, the framed *Libé* on the bookshelf – are also the most likely to seem farcical, on par with the coin jar of 'democratips'. The dissonances within *Le Simone* recreate a boundary of knowledge and belonging, which sets it apart from other Catholic spaces in Lyon: 'an *inside*, an interiority which is all the more impenetrable for not being straightforwardly spatialized' (Candea 2010b: 128). This boundary can only be breached thanks to the explanations of insiders, clarifying how the puzzle pieces fit together. Café customers, or new coworking members familiarising themselves with the space, very often ask to *understand*, and prompt conversations with baristas or longstanding regulars who delight in enlightening them. *Why* decorate Christmas trees with recycled trash? *Why* refuse to sell Coca-Cola or other mainstream brands? Curious customers are introduced in broad terms to the Catholic and anti-capitalist notion of *écologie intégrale*, and told that 'Thou shalt not pollute' should be taken at face-value, as a summarization of *Le Simone*'s ethical and religious purpose. Likewise, the hodgepodge of activities held within *Le Simone* – the folk dance events, say, or the weekly vegetable-basket table set up by a local market gardener – can all be more or less directly related to Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, advocating for a renewal of community ties, social economics, and green politics for the joint welfare of mankind and the planet. Some customers might push further: *why* sandwiches named after Popes and the football players of the *Olympique Lyonnais*? Well, they represent *Le Simone*'s roots[91], they will be told: Catholicism and the city of Lyon – in fact, the sandwiches are also a feminist commentary, since the local women's team is more successful than the men's, and female footballers feature more heavily on the sandwich menu. *Why* 'democratips', then? A philosophical reflection on the current state of political institutions, is the answer – customers' attention will be called to the bottom of the jar, where the coins mingle into a single pile regardless of which voting slot they have been dropped through. And *why* a goldfish named Sushi? Oh, they will be told, that was just the coworkers having a laugh, but it can surely be interpreted as an ecological commentary, if you give us a minute to think up a convincing explanation – after all, the Christmas tree, 'democratips', and sandwiches named after Popes started out as jokes too.

Overall, then, the space of *Le Simone* serves as an introduction to *écologie intégrale*, but it does so in an equivocal manner. On the one hand, it offers itself up to be 'read': its eclectic décor attracts interpretation and can be tied back discursively to the core end-goals of

[91] The discourse of 'roots' in the French nation, and the place of 'roots' in *écologie intégrale*, are discussed respectively in Chapters Two and Three.

écologie intégrale, namely environmentalism and social community-building. On the other hand, the regulars of *Le Simone* are quite sanguine about admitting that much of the organisation of the space developed spontaneously or irreflectively after the café's inauguration, as baristas and coworking members laid claim to the blank canvas they had been given, largely without any input from the *AlterCathos* Committee. It is only retroactively and narratively that the décor's random features were folded back into the intentional ideal of 'Catholic ecology'. These personal touches which, from the outside, are neither obviously arbitrary nor clearly curated, ultimately play a central gatekeeping role: they force a disconnection between *Simone* 'insiders' and customers – even customers who have an in-depth knowledge of Catholic tradition and doctrine. By prompting conversations between the two groups, they enable the integration of the latter once they possess the codes to understand the space. This mechanism was not intentional at first, but once regulars realised that customers were prone to asking for explanations about the décor, they repeated the process: the café's second winter saw the installation of an upside-down Christmas tree, tied to the rafters of the café. Intrigued customers were told that the tree's upside-down positioning symbolised the inversion – pun gleefully intended – of the mass-market consumerism associated with Christmas nowadays.

Overall, the regulars take seriously their interpretive responsibility towards newcomers. This includes, on the coworkers' part, clear efforts to point out the rare elements of *Le Simone* which are truly unconnected to the café's central purposes. Their habit of playing war-themed video games after lunch, in particular, is introduced with the caveat that it is *just* a pastime. They single out these games as 'not very *Simone*' (*pas très 'Simone'*): while other elements of the café's furnishings can be tied back to Catholic ecology in far-fetched ways – indeed, the more tongue-in-cheek the better – the first-person shooter video games seem to cross a line beyond which it would be abusive to try to claim any link to Catholic ideals, even jokingly. In short, less than a year after the creation of *Le Simone*, and despite knowing *écologie intégrale* only in the broadest of terms, its regulars – many of whom had never attended *Les AlterCathos*'s evening conferences – had collectively started to interpret and evaluate all of its internal actions according to two axes of meaning: environmentalism, and social Catholicism. They were, however, alert to the fact that such meanings were only equivocally intentional: retrospective analysis, rhetoric, and joking explanations were spliced alongside and into purposeful action and genuine personal engagement.

A successful grassroots expansion: 'Laudato Si' in Action'

Les AlterCathos promote a 'do it yourself' atmosphere within *Le Simone*: they encourage new arrivals – café regulars or coworking members, who are not all Catholic, philosophy-minded, or politically-inclined – to launch their own projects within the space of *Le Simone*. These projects can take several forms. Most often, they involve taking a low-commitment investment in the café's organisation: new members who feel strongly about recycling, or decorating the café, are free to take responsibility for these aspects of daily life in *Le Simone*. This 'light' form of participation leads to the discursive introductions to *écologie intégrale* discussed in the previous section. More surprisingly, as far as new arrivals are concerned, they are encouraged to use the premises of *Le Simone* as a HQ to launch their own events, workshops, or think tanks, or to develop ties with other local businesses, neighbourhood inhabitants, or ecological groups; such that *Le Simone* might become a hub where a diversity of passionate individuals incubate fruitful new initiatives. One workshop in particular, founded by Marie Sève and her housemate Solène, illustrates how this bottom-up approach successfully induces growing numbers of regulars to commit more profoundly to *écologie intégrale*, and sustains the 'vitality' desired by the *AlterCathos* Committee.

When I met Solène in 2017, she seemed at home in *Le Simone*, but she quickly highlighted that she was a relative newcomer compared to long-term *AlterCathos* Committee members. Solène describes herself as 'barely Catholic' (*à peine catho*) and her background as mixed: her mother comes from bourgeois Catholic spheres, but her father is 'an atheist lefty' (*un gauchiste athée*) – they met while working in a charitable NGO. Solène and her siblings were taught to value strong principles, open-mindedness and respect: their mother went to Church on Sundays, their father joined syndicalist demonstrations, and both insisted on the importance of giving one's time and energy for the welfare of others. As a result, all of Solène's siblings are politically or ethically engaged; in particular, her elder sister has been living in the experimental, green and egalitarian utopia of Auroville (India) for several years. For her part, Solène's PhD in neuro-psychology leaves her with little free time. Her 'only' ethical engagements, as she refers to them, are a fully zero-waste lifestyle; regular participations in the lobbying and civil disobedience protests run by radical ecological collective *Alternatiba*; and, finally, volunteering with *Le Simone*. Solène had heard her friend and housemate, Marie Sève, speak of the new café's opening: since *Le Simone* is a five minutes' walk away from their flat, Solène saw it as an 'efficient' opportunity to promote green lifestyles in a space where such initiatives are welcomed.

Solène's interest in practical green efforts, combined with Marie's longer-term experience of *Les AlterCathos*'s intellectual and epistemological habits, led them to launch a regular ecological workshop dedicated to reading and applying the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Solène had not read the encyclical, but had noticed that its table of contents follows a parallel reasoning to her favourite ecological manifesto, a documentary film and accompanying book called *Demain* ('Tomorrow'; Dion 2016). Both *Demain* and *Laudato Si'* address the links between climate change and global inequality; both start out with practical observations related to food, waste, and energy consumption in the West, and suggest relatively undemanding lifestyle changes; before scaling up their analysis to question global economic and political paradigms, and propose more in-depth transformations around corporations, banks, and democratic institutions. Both documents further suggest that neoliberal and consumerist lifestyles hamper emotional and social health, and therefore argue that degrowth (*la décroissance*) is also a matter of spiritual wellbeing – for Pope Francis – and self-care – for the authors of *Demain*. Marie and Solène's workshop, titled *Laudato Si' en Actes* – '*Laudato Si'* in Action' or 'in Deeds' – therefore aimed to introduce the largely neoliberal and consumerist population of Ainay to the notion and practice of *sobriété heureuse*, or 'happy sobriety' (Rabhi 2010) advocated by the encyclical and *Demain*. They hoped the workshop would foster solidarity between participants such that they might support each other through personal lifestyle changes, and collectively launch larger ecological projects within the space of *Le Simone*. Pairs of meetings were devoted to themes addressed by *Laudato Si'*, such as food, waste, or renewable energy: the first meeting would involve a theoretical conversation about the stakes of this topic, while the second would initiate concrete action. Participants were expected to read thematic excerpts of *Laudato Si'* ahead of each pair of meetings, and were encouraged to engage with other ecological texts and films, such as *Demain*.

The '*Laudato Si'* in Action' workshop (henceforth LSiA) proved appealing to many among the diverse customer base of *Le Simone*, and formed a meeting ground for groups who otherwise do not intersect much in the daily life of the café. It gathered three of the long-term Committee members, who had helped to develop the political philosophy of *Les AlterCathos*; several theology students from the nearby *Université Catholique de Lyon*, who had in-depth knowledge of *Laudato Si'* but no practical experience of environmental or political engagement; several coworking members sensitive to the climate crisis who found it practical to join a workshop taking place on their everyday work premises, despite being indifferent to religion or lapsed Catholics themselves; and finally, a number of stay-at-home mothers from

the neighbourhood, who welcomed the opportunity to socialize. Participants acknowledged that they would each bring different levels of readiness to the conversation: some forgot to read the passages from *Laudato Si'*, others struggled to 'think out of the box' of their daily habits; but they were confident that pooling their resources would result in '*Laudato Si'*-compatible' ecological efforts (a designation which in effect covers most ecological efforts, with the exception of anti-natality views). Participants also acknowledged that they had different personal motivations for joining the group: good-natured barbs were occasionally exchanged, as middle-aged housewives with a personal background of pious Catholicism noted how little time of each meeting was actually devoted to reading *Laudato Si'* – 'Pope Francis must be feeling a tiny bit instrumentalised, poor dear' – and younger coworkers with prior experience of environmentalism needled the former – 'I can't believe it takes a Pope to get you to start recycling'.

These comments, half-joking and half-serious, hinted at workshop participants' awareness that the group gathered multiple traditions of piety and of environmental consciousness (cf. Laidlaw 2010), with different articulations of individual duty and responsibility vis-à-vis the planet, humanity, the Pope, or God. But what might have devolved into explicit moral disagreements never did: instead, participants gave credit to one another for providing interpersonal motivation, and focused on 'getting on with' their respective and collective ecological efforts. As Solène summarized it, the group aspired to a 'green conversion' (*conversion verte/ écologique*): the term is not intended to be religious in nature, but signals the profound and rapid transformation workshop participants wanted to achieve together. 'Ecology is like the conversion of St Paul in Damascus,' is a metaphor Solène used among this audience, whose proportion of lapsed- and non-Catholic members were nonetheless largely conversant with Biblical narratives: 'the scales fall from your eyes and you can only cease to persecute the planet'[92]. In this sense, the LSiA group focused more on concrete action and rapid outcomes – what progress can be done, and what 'persecutions' can be ceased – than on the long-term spiritual or ethical justifications which might undergird each participant's own investment.

[92] St Paul, or Paul the Apostle, is known for having persecuted early Christians, before experiencing a radical – miraculous, according to the Biblical Book of the Apostles – conversion. He devoted the remainder of his life to founding Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe, and developing Christian theology through epistolary correspondences with these communities.

The LSiA workshop swiftly laid its mark on *Le Simone*. They introduced recycling bins and plans for compost collection; they negotiated an affiliation with the French branch of 'Incredible Edibles' and, with the approval of the neighbourhood council, planted vegetable plots in the public square adjacent to the café; and finally they created a partnership with a local vegetable producer. The task of developing new projects did not fall to Marie and Solène despite their status as workshop convenors: the responsibility lay with the participants who had submitted each idea. One LSiA member, Stella, was vegan – a rare occurrence in bourgeois Catholic circles – and determined that the agricultural partnership should be vegan-friendly: she took the lead in selecting and liaising with a local organic producer. The contract Stella negotiated, known as an *AMAP* ('Association for the Maintenance of Farmer Agriculture'[93]), consists in weekly distributions of crates of fresh vegetables on the basis of subscriptions. Stella had not, prior to joining LSiA, been an active member of *Le Simone*'s community, but her passionate investment in the *AMAP* caused her to become a much more central figure; first as she drummed up interest for vegetable baskets, and then as she presided over their distribution every Tuesday inside *Le Simone*. Two years later, when Stella stopped being able to devote so much time to the project, another volunteer took over, and undertook to add fresh eggs to the erstwhile vegan baskets. Likewise, when Marie and Solène stopped being able to commit to the LSiA workshop after two years at its helm, a newcomer to *Le Simone*, André, volunteered to take charge, and ensured its continued existence and 'vitality'. In recent years, the '*Laudato Si'* in Action' group has followed the impetus of *Demain* and *Laudato Si'* by moving on to address systemic political-economic matters: notably, several workshop members have transferred their personal finances to cooperative banks with ethical investment programs. Under the impetus of LSiA, *Le Simone* has also rejoined an emerging and still-tentative network of Lyon-based paper currency: *Le Simone* now accepts payment in '*Gonettes*'[94] in addition to Euros. In turn, the café contributes to local economic redistribution by acquiring its coffee beans from a nearby independent torrefactor; a transaction which also takes place in *Gonettes*.

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[93] *Association pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne.*

[94] The name '*Gonette*' is a made-up diminutive form of the word '*gone*', an archaic regional term meaning 'male child' which today designates true Lyonnais inhabitants. Although the suffix *–ette* most often indicates a female diminutive, '*gonette*' is not the feminine form of '*gone*': the counterpart for female children in Lyonnais dialect is '*fenotte*'. *Les Gones* and *Les Fenottes* are also the respective nicknames of the men's and women's squads of Lyon's football club, *L'Olympique Lyonnais*.

The ongoing success of the '*Laudato Si'* in Action' workshop proves David's intuition, expressed during the open consultation evening, that key activities within *Le Simone* can self-regulate without much input from the *AlterCathos* Committee. By giving free rein to passionate individuals to launch one-off events or long-lasting projects – running LSiA, opening the *AMAP*, managing *Gonettes* finances, organising folk dances, board-games evenings, poetry evenings, comic-drawing workshops, Christmas decoration workshops, clothes-swap weekends, and so on – the founding members of *Les AlterCathos* gradually induce new acquaintances into joining the wider *Simone* community, and partaking in *écologie intégrale*. Neither Stella, nor André, nor indeed Solène, would have become invested in *Le Simone* had they not first proposed and taken charge of one of its multitude of internal events. This is what David Coureau and Marie Sève recognise not only as 'collective life' but also as the conjunction of 'life, reflection, and labour' which, according to *écologie intégrale*, guarantees personal fulfillment as well as a social and environmental Common Good.

A problematic initiative: Yoga, and the limits of a Catholic space

In the autumn of 2017, a year and a half after the opening of *Le Simone*, the *AlterCathos* Committee intervened to shut down an independent initiative for the first time, claiming that it did not correspond to the core values of *Le Simone* or of *Les AlterCathos*. This incident highlighted the extent to which, despite its profusion of tongue-in-cheek narratives, *Le Simone* takes seriously its nature as a 'Catholic space'. It also showcased that when push comes to shove, beyond its do-it-yourself decentralisation and inclusivity, *Le Simone*'s target audience remains the conservative Catholic bourgeoisie, with the aim of changing *this* audience's politics in favour of *écologie intégrale*.

The *AlterCathos* Committee's intervention into the usually largely-unregimented daily life of *Le Simone* caused controversy firstly because it concerned an event launched by Blandine, who had been a pillar of *Le Simone* since its inauguration, and whom all regulars appreciated and respected. Between 2016 and late-2017, Blandine was one of the two part-time managers of *Le Simone*, both Lyonnais Catholics in their late-twenties. She had been recruited before the opening of *Le Simone* on the grounds that her degree in events management and her vast social network among the *grandes familles* of the Lyonnais bourgeoisie[95] would be assets to the launch of *Les AlterCathos*'s new business. Neither Blandine nor the second manager,

[95] See Thesis Introduction for a discussion of the *grandes familles lyonnaises*.

Hippolyte, had been members of *Les AlterCathos* before being placed in charge of the executive running of *Le Simone*, and both occasionally bemoaned the fact that the Committee expected them to bring to fruition an intellectual ideal – *écologie intégrale* – which they were only just discovering themselves. Both Hippolyte and Blandine pointed out to me, on separate occasions, that their position as salaried café managers was a paradoxical one: their duty to not only run *Le Simone*, but run it in line with *écologie intégrale*, coincided poorly with the *AlterCathos* Committee's hands-off, decentralised directives. Whereas other users of *Le Simone* were encouraged to launch passion-driven initiatives as a means to avoid alienated labour, Hippolyte and Blandine individually admitted that they occasionally wished to be given clearer guidance by the Committee – in their view, their own 'dignity of work' could be well-served by successfully implementing instructions for the development of the space, even at the cost of a lesser scope for improvisation.

Hippolyte had the advantage over Blandine – as he himself put it – of having studied philosophy; not at the elite level of the *AlterCathos* founders, but at least as far as a Master's degree at the Parisian *Institut de Philosophie Comparée*. The *IPC*, Hippolyte jokingly explained, has a reputation for attracting very traditional Catholic young women, who follow its classes only as long as it takes them to meet and marry equally traditional young men studying at the nearby Faculties of Medicine and Law – still ironically, Hippolyte expressed regrets that his best efforts hadn't 'landed him' a doctor for a wife, but at least his time at the *IPC* had prepared him to follow *Les AlterCathos*'s conferences. Hippolyte's facetious character can be credited for some of the more tongue-in-cheek decorations of the café, described earlier. Quick-witted and brash, Hippolyte excelled at entertaining himself and others through rhetoric, and could be counted on to provide deadpan commentary justifying just about anything with reference to ecology and Catholicism. By contrast, Blandine didn't *play*: a more reserved character, she was aloof and prickly with newcomers until a mutual rapport was established, at which point she became a fiercely supportive and reliable friend – the coworkers joked that one becomes a *Simone* 'regular' when one learns to see through Blandine's impatience and chronic irritation to the heart of gold beneath. In their different ways, Hippolyte and Blandine were both devoted to making *Le Simone* an inclusive space: Hippolyte's enthusiasm made every café customer feel instantly comfortable, while Blandine took on a more long-term nurturing role towards the coworkers, orchestrating their coalition into a social group by remembering birthdays, celebrating milestones, encouraging them to gather around homemade baked goods, and always acerbically refusing thanks for her efforts

with crabby warnings that *this one* was the last cake she would bring. Hippolyte and the regulars often pushed Blandine to take on a more carefree attitude, but she replied that managing *Le Simone* was her job: while she did wish to treat *Le Simone* as a space for creative initiatives, she was upfront about struggling to do so.

Blandine eventually overcame her reticence when she had the idea of organising a regular yoga class in *Le Simone*. This would offer an opportunity for physical exercise and relaxation to stay-at-home mothers and middle-aged women from the neighbourhood of Ainay, who were not catered for by the local sports clubs in Blandine's opinion. Blandine contacted a yoga instructor, who agreed to run a trial session in *Le Simone*; and she crucially requested that the instructor should use the French name for each posture rather than Sanskrit, and avoid any reference to Eastern spirituality. Advertised through *Le Simone*'s social media accounts, the inaugural 'Yoga in *Le Simone*' event received mixed responses: the sign-up list was soon full, but a large number of online comments were posted to express surprise, disappointment, and even anger against this scheduling. One virulent response on Facebook – by a young woman who regularly attended *Les AlterCathos*'s conferences and could not be dismissed as an intrusive online troublemaker – stated that a yoga session would be 'risky, and even dangerous' (*risqué, et même dangereux*) to the spiritual development of participants, whom she assumed would all be Catholic. Both online and in the café, the following few days saw an escalation of arguments for and against 'Yoga in *Le Simone*', prompting many to express their previously-implicit understandings of what *Le Simone* stood for, what *Les AlterCathos*'s ultimate purpose was, and what place Catholicism was meant to have in those projects.

Blandine, dismayed and a little defensive in the face of this commotion, argued that a yoga session was no different from the other events held in *Le Simone*: she pointed out that it would fulfill an inclusive community-building role, and indeed restore a measure of 'human dignity' to women marginalised by the patriarchal sports industry. She added that it was also compatible with *Le Simone*'s ecological concerns, since yoga trains practitioners to be mindful of their immediate surroundings and respectful of the natural environment. By putting forward these arguments, Blandine replicated the usual pattern of narratives in *Le Simone*, whereby participants' Catholicism and faith are 'bracketed off' as a topic of discussion, while outcomes – community-building and green practices – are the primary object of concern and are held up as evidence of *écologie intégrale* in action. This view of *écologie intégrale* as an efficacy-driven, world-oriented teleology, treats the social world as

'neither residual nor ancillary to the self', but as 'itself the purpose of moral judgment and action' (Piliavsky & Sbriccoli 2016: 376).

But Blandine's detractors on Facebook replied that yoga's element of mindful training was precisely the problem: was she prepared to take the risk that participants would 'accidentally become Buddhist' (*se retrouver bouddhistes par mégarde*)? This comment was dismissed as entirely preposterous by some, especially since all knew that the yoga session would involve no mention of spirituality. But others argued that the religious elements of yoga were in-built: if its repetitive physical motions had been designed, for millennia, to facilitate interiority and a focus on the self, their cultivation could only result in self-absorption and distanciation from God. One of *Les AlterCathos*' Vice-Presidents, Raphaël, who dropped by *Le Simone* for a beer one evening, was of this opinion: citing philosopher Pierre Hadot's notion of 'spiritual exercises' (2002 [1981]) and its influence on Michel Foucault's work on techniques of the self (1990 [1984]; 1992 [1984]), Raphaël categorically asserted that bodily and spiritual self-formation are inescapably tied. After all, he argued, Catholicism has its own physical practices, such as genuflection, which predispose the faithful to worship, and to a decentred rather than self-centred attitude – several *Simone* regulars surrounding him while he made this point guffawed and replied that Blandine could hardly organise an hour-long session of genuflection as a form of physical exercise for neighbourhood housewives.

On a baseline level, though, Blandine's argument that yoga teaches environmental mindfulness, and her detractors' response that it ineluctably leads to spiritual transformations, outline a shared emic theory of practice: on both sides of the debate, habit and repetitive engagement were considered to contribute to convictions and (new) allegiances. In theoretical terms, Blandine's reliance on a world-oriented, outcome-driven teleology of community and green practices was undercut by the shared belief that interior states are part and parcel of those outcomes, and must be taken into consideration. In this case, matters were further complicated by the widespread assumption, among *Le Simone*'s members, that yoga promotes self-centred development (an 'I-oriented' *telos*) while Catholicism instead teaches to place God and one's 'brother' or 'neighbour' (*son frère, son prochain*) above oneself. As one *Simone* regular – with a PhD in theology – concluded, Catholicism is about self-abandonment (*l'abandon de soi*): in other words, the Catholic *telos* is to relinquish I-oriented *teloi*. The spiritual and ethical conversation taking place around 'Yoga in *Le Simone*' was therefore a particularly recursive conundrum: participants' personal spiritual development was revealed to matter insofar as, in the long run, Catholic practices were assumed to allow a transcendence

of the self in service of world-oriented projects – such as *écologie intégrale,* but also other projects of environmentalism.

Debates in *Le Simone* went on as regulars weighed the outcomes of yoga in terms of interiority, spirituality and the self. Perhaps a mitigating solution would be for each participant to recite the Rosary in their own minds during the yoga session, one café regular suggested. Another continued: the clientèle of the yoga event would in any case benefit from spending time in *Le Simone*, since it is a Catholic space – if they found *Le Simone* to be friendly and welcoming, they might be attracted to the Catholic faith, and then abandon their misguided inclination towards yoga. At this point, Raphaël peremptorily cut short to the debate: *Le Simone* might be a Catholic space, he judged, but it 'is not a space of evangelisation' (*Le Simone n'est pas un lieu d'évangélisation*).

At length, while the 'Yoga in *Le Simone*' event took place as advertised, the *AlterCathos* Committee requested that Blandine not schedule any subsequent sessions. This decision was not, they insisted, a theological or a spiritual one: the Committee were divided on the question of whether yoga is or isn't an acceptable practice for Catholics, but the problem laid elsewhere. More critically, the 'Yoga in *Le Simone*' event had damaged *Les AlterCathos*'s reputation, which they already considered to be on shaky ground among the largely Right-wing, bourgeois Lyonnais *cathosphère* due to occasional rumours that *Les AlterCathos* had become 'Left-wing' (cf. Chapter Three). The Committee told Blandine that it was already enough of an uphill battle for *Les AlterCathos* to encourage the conservative Catholic community of Ainay to shift their political and economic habits away from liberalism and towards degrowth, without adding to the mix an impression that *Les AlterCathos* toyed with their members' faith. By organising an event which could be considered 'anti-Catholic' from a certain perspective, and thereby making a number of their most pious regulars feel unwelcome in *Le Simone,* the Committee argued that Blandine had discredited the rest of their activities – whose underlying morality had thus far not been questioned – and effectively obstructed the promotion of *écologie intégrale*. The Committee, like Blandine initially, relied on an outcome-oriented evaluative frame – all aimed to introduce new audiences to *Le Simone* and *écologie intégrale* – but the difference laid in the audiences they respectively considered to be the priority. Blandine's intended audience of neighbourhood women and yoga enthusiasts was outweighed by the Committee's target audience of the conservative Catholic bourgeoisie.

When the Committee concluded that the yoga event did not correspond to *Le Simone*'s core values, therefore, they did not count Catholic faith as a core value per se: as far as they were concerned, the spiritual lives of *Simone* regulars were their own business. However, *effectiveness* in putting *écologie intégrale* into action was the Committee's core aspiration: this, in turn, required approachability and non-confrontation vis-à-vis conservative target audiences, for whom traditional Catholic deontology *could be* a non-negotiable value. This formed the hard limit of *Les AlterCathos*'s decentralised, 'do it yourself' approach to running *Le Simone*: any initiative which could be considered 'anti-Catholic' either on a conceptual level or on the pragmatic level of scaring away certain traditional Catholic audiences, would be shut down.

Conclusion: Political theology as world-oriented religious ethics

To conclude this chapter, I would like to reflect on what the place of Catholicism in *Le Simone*, and in *Les AlterCathos*'s practical efforts to put *écologie intégrale* into practice, might tell us about analytical approaches to religious politics more widely.

The anthropology of religion has long struggled against a tendency to view instances of religious politics through the lens of what one might call the 'façade of faith'[96] (cf. Deeb 2006) – that is, the assumption that political practices enforced by religious institutions are an instrumentalisation of faith, and not *real* religion. This perspective stems from the modernist definition of what *counts* as 'faith' and as 'religion': anthropologists of Christianity have already pointed out that the modern definition of religion as a private, interior matter produces the subsequent, ingrained idea that 'religion done right' necessarily relies on transcendent faith and inner belief (Coleman 2014: 290), and vice-versa, that religion is no better than 'heterodox' when it 'fails to offer a radical separation between body and spirit' (Cannell 2006: 7-8). This can be seen in literature that takes for granted that religious encounters with the secular world and public spheres are less pure or less 'religious' than other, more introspective forms of religious life – that 'wherever it engages in down-to-earth concerns of

[96] I borrow this phrase from Lara Deeb's recollection that before she started her fieldwork among pious Lebanese Shi'i women, 'a colleague in Lebanon (...) urged me to seek out the places where what he called "the façade of faith" did not hold up (...) in order to explain how faith is "really" a political-economic strategy' (Deeb 2006: 40).

governance and policy, law and order, [religion] cannot but secularize – that is to say, ultimately render profane – its ways' (de Vries 2006: 13[97]).

To counter this view, anthropologists such as Lara Deeb (2006) and Ruth Marshall (2009) have eloquently and convincingly argued that their Shi'i and Pentacostal interlocutors, respectively, view inner faith and political action as mutually co-constitutive – in other words, that religious politics can be a fully pious practice rather than an instrumentalisation of faith. Deeb's and Marshall's analytical strategy maintains the core idea that 'religion done right' concerns inner belief and piety; but they stretch the ethnographic scope beyond mosques, churches, and rituals to encompass pious practices of governance and community-building, performed by devout men and women in order to become self-improved Muslims (Deeb 2006: 30-31) or attain redemption and salvation (Marshall 2009: 8). But whereas Deeb's and Marshall's interlocutors are pious and value piety, the members of *Le Simone* have a far more ambiguous conception of the place and value of faith and piety in relation to *écologie intégrale*. How, then, can they escape being tarred with the brush of instrumentalism? Can they at all avoid the conclusion that *écologie intégrale* is 'really' a political-economic strategy behind a 'façade' of religion?

In the field, it took me an (embarrassingly) long time to realise that while Catholicism is present in *Le Simone* in the form of physical objects – like the wooden cross hidden behind the coffee percolator – and as a ubiquitous topic of conversation in explanations of the space's Catholic ecology – the café is nonetheless largely devoid of *piety*. This absence was pointed out to me through a comparison with a Catholic café/bar in another neighbourhood of Lyon where piety is contrastingly cultivated. A much smaller business, open only on alternate Saturday evenings, the other bar is run by a Dominican congregation – an institutional branch of the Catholic Church under the purview of the diocese, contrary to *Le Simone*'s autonomous management by lay Catholics. In the Dominican bar, prayers are said collectively at opening and closing time, customers recite Grace before consuming any food or drink, and regulars are encouraged to view the biweekly bar nights as opportunities to ask the Dominican monks-cum-bartenders for spiritual advice – indeed, regulars can even schedule Confession if they get in touch in advance. None of these forms of piety are available, or desired, in *Le Simone*.

[97] This quote by a divinity scholar focuses on Islam, and continues by asserting that 'The ways of politics are the ways of the world. One cannot but be *of this world*, that is, come to belong *to this world*, as soon or as long as one is *in this world*, in other words, as soon or as long as history and human finitude follow their course' (de Vries 2006: 13, original emphases).

I once asked David Coureau if *Les AlterCathos* had ever included prayers in their events. He answered that they briefly had, in 2011, at the very start of the association: *AlterCathos* 'reflection groups' (cf. Chapter Three) were scheduled to take place every Sunday morning from 8.30am to noon, and participants were encouraged to meet earlier to attend the 7am local Mass together. By the third week, only David, Marie Sève, and their friend Hilaire woke up on time for the 7am service. The place of the impractical early-morning Masses was then drawn into question: it was already implicitly agreed that they would be discontinued, and the challenge was rather to narrativise this into a coherent statement about the association's spiritual purposes. To this day, David acknowledges the rhetoric nuances of this process:

> We agreed that we were giving up on collective Mass attendance for a contingent reason and an intellectual one (*une raison conjoncturelle et une raison intellectuelle*). The contingent reason was that Mass at this hour, among this particular group of people, was not working. We tried monthly prayer groups instead and that failed too, maybe because we were just *not great* [*pas très bons*, i.e. insufficiently motivated to make an effort], or because structurally it wasn't a good fit for us. Maybe it would have kept going in other circumstances; remembering this contingent reason keeps us honest when we explain the intellectual reason. That second reason, which is really more primordial, is that we want lay Catholics to receive a Catholic intellectual education which is distinct from their ritual lives (*la vie de culte*).

Abandoning the group prayers due to their lack of 'vitality', members were freed to pursue more individually-chosen and 'vitality'-inducing ritual lives (*vie de culte*) among the many – competing – forms of Catholic worship on offer across the diocese of Lyon. David enumerates:

> Some go to the *Messe tradi* [a slightly pejorative shorthand for the traditional, extraordinary-form Mass], others go to the *Messe cha-cha* [an equally pejorative shorthand for the charismatics], others still to their local parish Mass, which is my case (*la Messe paroissiale*). Some people go to 'renewal' Masses [*des Messes 'renouveau'*], what do I even know about that, and there's also people who don't go to Mass at all.

Les AlterCathos thus established that to their minds, 'Christian life is wide-ranging'; and they decided to aim their own associative range of action specifically away from both ritual life (*la vie de culte*) and doctrinal or theological life (*la vie gnostique*). Instead, they pinpointed lay life (*la vie laïque*) as their sphere of predilection, the dimension of Christian life which they could authoritatively scrutinize and to which they could offer novel suggestions (cf. Mayblin 2017). This had two practical consequences on the running of the

association: it enshrined the decision not to discuss theology – God or Christ are only ever mentioned on exceptional occasions, such as when the yoga event opened the can of worms – and it marked the end of any form of prayer during *AlterCathos* events. The opening of *Le Simone* reinforced these choices: contrary to the Dominican-run bar, 'we have no "priest in residence", and neither do we want one', David concluded. He wrapped up his explanation with reference to the community-building goal of *écologie intégrale*: a 'priest in residence' would likely intimidate certain Catholics and prevent them from joining *Le Simone*, to say nothing of scaring off the more-or-less lapsed ones along with all non-Catholics. Returning to the prevalent mode of justification whereby the effective implementation of *écologie intégrale* is paramount, David this time classified 'priests in residence' and 'intimidating' collective prayers under the same category as yoga: as obstacles potentially deterring Catholic audiences from taking part in the 'lay life' of *Le Simone*.

Returning to the question of analytical approaches to projects of religious politics: does David's cavalier attitude towards 'priests in residence' make *Le Simone* less Catholic, *écologie intégrale* less of a 'religious' paradigm, and *Les AlterCathos*'s desire to 'do politics as Catholics' a mere façade for 'just politics'? I suggest that the ethnographic ambiguity between ethics of efficacy and ethics of conviction in *Le Simone* only seems 'ambiguous' from an analytical perspective which implicitly values the latter over the former. Phrased differently, the practices of *écologie intégrale* in *Le Simone* only seem inconclusively 'Catholic' from an analytical perspective which assumes that one must *be* Catholic in order to *act* in a Catholic manner. From the standpoint of ethics of conviction, it is genuinely difficult to parse out the multiple 'I-oriented' spiritual and ethical motivations spurring the diverse participants in *écologie intégrale*, or to outline a clear way in which *écologie intégrale* maps onto Catholic piety.

I consider, however, that this ambiguity proves analytically fruitful if it is observed from a zoomed-out, broader theoretical scale. The observation that *Simone* regulars are unsure whether personal Catholic faith *matters* in the course of putting into practice a discourse, *écologie intégrale*, which they acknowledge as 'Catholic' overall is, to my mind, more than an ethnographic observation: it is an analytical answer to a question anthropologists of religion haven't quite framed yet. In light of recent work which views 'ordinary lives' as truly religious (Schielke & Debevec 2012; cf. Chapter Three) and world-oriented 'ethics of efficacy' as truly ethical rather than mere 'calculative instrumentalism' (Piliavsky & Sbriccoli 2016: 374), I argue that we might take political theologies, that is, *world-oriented religious*

ethics, seriously – as truly religious and truly ethical. By adopting this analytical starting point, we might then jettison the implicit impetus to argue that politics *can* be fully religious *if* they are also fully based on personal piety, and open up a space for comparative ethnographic investigation by asking, in each context, *how* personal faith and piety are negotiated in the process of efficaciously practicing paradigms of political theology.

In short, against modernist assumptions that 'religion done right' concerns inner belief and cannot be 'of this world' without ultimately rendering its ways 'profane' (cf. de Vries 2006: 13), I advocate for an investigation of the emic conceptions of actors who might have a different view of what 'being of this world' entails, and of where the interface between 'the profane' and 'the religious' falls. Lara Deeb's and Ruth Marshall's respective explorations of 'pious modern' Shi'i lives in Lebanon (Deeb 2006) and Pentacostal 'political spiritualities' in Nigeria (Marshall 2009) are, in this sense, two instances of political theologies – one each from Islam and Christianity – which both prescribe that personal piety is essential in the course of carrying out everyday actions of governance and community-building. In line with this central prescription, Deeb and Marshall describe the mechanisms through which their respective interlocutors negotiate the interface between religious and profane – the ways in which pious Shi'i women view and sustain distinctions from non-Shi'i Muslims and non-Muslim Lebanese communities, and the role of evangelisation in 'winning Nigeria for Jesus' (Marshall 2009: 13). *Écologie intégrale* is also a political theology – a world-oriented religious ethic, which is 'oriented' towards the environmental care of the planet and the social care for its people – but it has a different internal articulation of belief, piety, and action, of which the dedication of *Laudato Si'* to 'every person living on this planet' (Pope Francis 2015: §3) is only a first indication.

This chapter has addressed several ways in which the articulation of Catholic culture, 'roots', faith, and piety are negotiated in *Le Simone* in the course of putting *écologie intégrale* into practice: I have shown that *Le Simone* creates a welcoming yet disconcerting interface whereby non-Catholics and Catholics alike are invited to recognise visual signs of Catholicism in the décor, yet to transform their prior understanding of these Catholic cues through the interpretive codes provided by café 'insiders'. I have shown how *Le Simone*'s decentralised organisation allows passionate individuals to launch and pursue green and collective initiatives, and thereby to implement *écologie intégrale* efficaciously without necessarily being practicing Catholics themselves – 'practicing', that is, in the sense of piety and ritual. Indeed, I have shown that forms of pious Catholic practice have been deliberately

kept away from the café, insulating its 'lay Catholic life' (*la vie laïque*) from ritual and doctrinal life. While the place of Catholic faith and piety are explicitly debated in the café on occasion, I have shown that the tensions which arise in *Le Simone* – such as the yoga cancellation – tend to occur over pragmatic disagreements as to the café's preferred target audience, rather than fundamental disagreements as to whether *écologie intégrale* is or is not effectively taking place. My overall conclusion is rather simple: I argue that the Catholic discourse of *écologie intégrale* is a political theology, i.e. a world-oriented religious ethic, in which *personal faith is a variable rather than a paramount requirement*.

Authors in the anthropology of Catholicism have pointed out its *complexio oppositorum* ('complex of opposites'): that is, the fact that there appears 'to be no antithesis it does not embrace' (Schmitt 1996 [1923]: 7; Muehlebach 2009, 2013). This is visible in case studies of syncretic Catholic beliefs and rituals, which embrace pre-Catholic cosmologies and culture without becoming less *Catholic* in the process (Cleary & Steigenga 2004; Mosse 2017, Hoenes del Pinal 2019). This 'capacity to hold such tensions and to unite within itself thesis and antithesis' (Mosse 2017: 105, on Schmitt 1996 [1923]) has been argued to preserve an 'externality' to Catholicism: 'it implies a political idea of Catholicism that keeps the church in the public sphere' (*ibid*.) where such tensions are negotiated dynamically. For example, David Mosse (2012; 2017) outlines historical shifts in the relationship between Catholicism and the caste system in rural South India, and contrasts two distinct ways in which Tamil Catholicism has negotiated the ideal of 'equality between men' – what I would call two political theologies, or world-oriented ethics. The first, spearheaded by 19th-century Jesuit missionaries, involved carving out a Catholic 'world' which was kept separate from the 'outer' world of Tamil society: by representing the Church as 'beyond the social', caste inequality was neutralized within the space of churches and rituals, allowing practices such as cross-caste godparent relationships among Tamil Catholics (2017: 114). By contrast, late-20th and 21st-century activism on the part of Dalit Catholics has instead argued that the Church should become invested in resolving caste inequality in the 'outer' world: a policy of 'preferential option for the Dalits' was postulated as a local iteration of the Church Social Teaching precept of 'the preferential option for the poor' (Jesuit Madurai Province 2002: 64-66, in Mosse 2017: 115-116). I suggest that the case study of *Le Simone* can be added to this body of research concerning forms of Catholic 'hierarchical encompassment' (L.Dumont 1986: 525; 1980 [1970]: 240; Robbins 2009, 2013b): it witnesses that the Catholic *complexio oppositorum* extends beyond negotiations of belief and ritual practices, and can be

spearheaded by lay actors as well as the clergy. The notion of *complexio oppositorum* has allowed anthropologists of Catholicism to pay particular attention to the 'externality' of the Church; but the 'worldly' concerns and projects of actors in any religious tradition might be fruitfully approached through the question of political theology, or world-oriented religious ethics. *Écologie intégrale*, which is one among many instances of political theology, embraces a particularly wide interface with the 'profane', since it includes not only lapsed- but also non-Catholics into the lay religious project of 'caring for our common home'.

CHAPTER FIVE

Scaling 'Our Common Home':

The Moral Landscapes of Subsidiarity

This chapter explores the ways in which *Les Alternatives Catholiques* deploy 'subsidiarity' as a mode of subjectivation to orient their personal practice of *écologie intégrale*. It argues that subsidiarity, as a scalar vision of the world, enables *Les AlterCathos* to contribute to the welfare of 'Our Common Home' on many concatenated scales simultaneously, and thereby undercuts previous French Catholic conceptions of politics which were predicated on the scale of the nation-state and on 'Frenchness'. This chapter concludes Part Two's exploration of the core concerns and modes of subjectivation of *écologie intégrale*, as well as the overarching investigation of French Catholic politics conducted throughout this thesis; making the case for anthropological and ethnographic engagements with religious actors' conception and curation of 'good worlds'.

Introduction

Founded as a private group in 2011, advertised in 2013 among the participants of *La Manif Pour Tous*, and expanded into a neighbourhood community in 2016 with the opening of *Le Simone*, *Les Alternatives Catholiques* have rapidly become influential and increasingly public. So public, in fact, that traces, hints, and explicit mentions of their operations can now be found in mainstream media coverage of Catholic life in France. This final chapter therefore continues Part Two's exploration of the development of *écologie intégrale*, but also addresses the recent intersection between this development and the pre-existing concerns explored

throughout Part One of the thesis – the equivocal visibility of French Catholics on the national public stage, and the contestations between ideals of community, belonging, and nationhood which arise as a result.

The role played by the media during *La Manif Pour Tous* has been addressed in Chapter One; bookending the thesis, the press now returns in Chapter Five. Tabloids the world over scrutinize the living arrangements of public figures in order to pass judgment on their character. In France, two types of housing situations have recently been deemed concerning enough to be subjected to critique by the mainstream press as well: civil servants who abuse of their political reach for the benefit of their own family life – for instance by fraudulently occupying low-rent council habitations, or by refurbishing government lodgings sumptuously with public funds – and, in a completely different register, Catholic intellectuals who choose to leave Paris and settle in rural villages.

Why is the latter worth reporting on, and what is it thought to reveal about Catholics? It has certainly preoccupied media outlets from all political sides in recent years. One case in particular features regularly in the news, that of a young Catholic family who left the capital to acquire a small provincial house 'full of books but with neither fridge nor washing machine' (Gonzague 05/11/2016). Wife and husband are both well-known public speakers and authors despite being only in their early thirties, and interviews with one or the other tend to follow the same template: 'he claims that he is *locavore*, he only eats local produce', reports one article (Guyet & Cuccagna 26/10/2015), while another quotes the wife as explaining that 'we eat little meat but a lot of fresh local produce, so a fridge is unnecessary, and for laundry we use the local laundromat' (Gonzague 2016). Speculating that this trend must be explained by something 'beyond this shared love for vegetables' (Guyet & Cuccagna 2015), most left-wing news outlets consider that it is the visible outcome of an underlying wave of conservative, anti-modern sentiment among Catholics. But the bafflement extends also to right-wing media. *Causeur*, a conservative, nationalist, and republican outlet, titles their article 'It's an organic house...' – dot dot dot – and cannot seem to decide what to make of the 'absence of a television' and choice to 'integrate into an existing [village] community' (Bories 25/12/2015). Too religious for this republican outlet? The article sarcastically wonders if the young '*écolo catho*' couple 'plant organic salads in their kitchen garden between two Masses' (*ibid.*). Too activist for the conservative press? 'Or else perhaps they have recruited a Syrian refugee to take care of it' (*ibid.*), the author muses, tongue-in-cheek,

confirming that the relationship between Catholic intellectuals and their vegetable patches is a matter of widespread national puzzlement.

From a distance, it is not evident why Catholic intellectuals' recent advocacy for small-scale, rural, or ecologically-minded lifestyles should appear so problematic to outside commentators; there is nothing strikingly wrong about appreciating the 'existing communit[ies]' of villages and small towns. Moreover, all the details on which the press lingers – the consumption of local produce, the use of the local laundromat – seem innocuous, or indeed virtuous in an era of acknowledged ecological crisis. And yet, the slew of recent Catholic publications[98] in support of these lifestyle choices tends to be treated with suspicion in mainstream French media. Reports suspect that this new interest in ecology is an 'avatar' for the 'conservative and Catholic Right' (Brésis 09/02/2015), deplore a self-serving 'grab' of the theme of degrowth by the 'ultraconservative Catholic young guard' (Sauvaget 06/09/2015), and warn of the emergence of a 'new reactionary tribe' (Gonzague 2016). By 2019, notwithstanding the attempts, by a variety of Catholic actors, to present their point of view in the press (Choquet *et al.* 24/07/2018; Bès 10/05/2019), the overall rise in interest for all things green among French Catholics is seen as part and parcel of the 'ideological recomposition of the hard Right' (Blin 05/05/2019). In particular, the fact that ecological topics eventually came to be featured by Marine Le Pen among the new themes of the *Rassemblement National*[99] party was perceived by the centre-left press as proof of the joining of the 'neopagan and Catholic Rights' into a single 'ultrareactionary discourse' (*ibid.*; see also Berteloot 14/04/2019). Any countervailing efforts to disambiguate the groups in question and explore their individual motives for 'going green' are lost in the midst of this moral panic.

The reasons for the moral panic itself are elucidated when taking into account the long-term history of French Republican civic nationalism (Stolcke 1995), discussed throughout Part One. On the one hand, the construction of the French nation has long been predicated on 'turning peasants into Frenchmen' (E.Weber 1976; McDonald 1989; Reed-Danahay 1996; Chapter Two) by reducing their local particularisms or co-opting their regional attachments into a scaled framework of paramount love for the Nation (Thiesse 1997). On the other hand,

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[98] Van Gaver 2011; Bès, Durano & Rokvam 2014; de Plunkett 2015; Revol 2015; Richard & Rey 2016; Arnsperger & Bourg 2017; Bès 2017; Hermann & Hermann 2018; Lafage 2020; Hermann & Hermann 2020.

[99] Marine Le Pen's far-right *Front National* party ('National Front') was renamed *Rassemblement National* ('National Gathering/Re-assembly') on 1st June 2018.

the early 21st-century has seen a rise of fears over religious communalism, epitomised by the 2004 'affair of the veil' (Asad 2006b, 2006c; Bowen 2007; Iteanu 2013; Fernando 2014) and re-awakened in 2013 by *La Manif Pour Tous*, which put the spotlight onto French Catholics in addition to ongoing attention directed towards French Muslims (Chapter One). In this setting, French Catholic intellectuals' choice to leave Paris – the capital and metonym for the Republic – in order to integrate into rural village communities raises old spectres. From the perspective of Republican commentators, this recent trend looks like an inversion of the 'peasants to Frenchmen' trajectory, an ideological subscription to discourses hailing the Christian and rural ethnic 'roots of France', and, overall, proof that Catholics are jettisoning their Republican identities in favour of a new far-right/religious identitarianism.

The *écolo catho* couple mentioned in the press coverage above – they of the 'organic house', kitchen garden, absent television, and local laundromat – are, it so happens, already known to the readers of this thesis: the husband is Hilaire Broie de Bugey, whose role in the foundation of *Les AlterCathos* was described in Chapter Three. During *La Manif Pour Tous,* Hilaire had been particularly invested in the public discussion group called *Les Veilleurs,* and in their early development of a paradigm of 'integral ecology' (Bès *et al* 2014; Chapter Three). It is in this context that he met his future wife, Mathilde, a young Catholic literature professor living in Paris – he moved from Lyon to the capital to rejoin her after they married. Charismatic, articulate, and unhesitatingly outspoken, both Hilaire and Mathilde became well-known figures among *Les Veilleurs*, and thereafter stayed on the radars of the media. I never had the chance to meet Hilaire myself, as he had already left Lyon to rejoin Mathilde – first in Paris, and then in the countryside – when I began my fieldwork. However, several other *AlterCathos* members whom I knew in Lyon have followed similar trajectories to Hilaire's and Mathilde's, moving to small provincial towns and rural villages. This decision was justified not with reference to communalist or identitarian projects, but with reference to *Laudato Si'* and the paradigm of *écologie intégrale*.

I suggest that the media's flawed conclusion – that young Catholic intellectuals are pursuing a new ultrareactionary politics – stems from a less-obvious, but crucially erroneous initial assessment of the scalar process they are observing. The press reports that Catholics are 'going local', and it is this directional move that they interpret as an ethno-cultural entrenchment – viewing Catholics as 'going local', the conclusion that they are 'going to ground' follows easily. In this chapter, I argue that a different scalar logic is at play in French Catholics' recent interest in all things ecological: not localism, but the logic of 'subsidiarity'.

Subsidiarity is one of the pillars of the Catholic Social Teaching (Pope Leo XIII 1891; Pius XI 1931); and a central tenet of the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* developed by *Les AlterCathos*. Simply put, the principle of subsidiarity entails a vision of the world as nested scales, and suggests that *the smallest appropriate scale for each context of life is the most beneficial*.

I therefore argue that the newfound ecological pursuits on a local level of Hilaire, Mathilde, and many other young Catholic intellectuals must not be viewed as 'going local' but rather as one expression, among many, of their efforts to evaluate the 'appropriateness' of multiple ways of scaling economic, political, and community life. Rather than promoting a particular pre-fabricated politics, or following a programmatic vision of the articulation between roots, identity, belonging, and nationhood, I argue that they are engaging with the principle of subsidiarity as a problematic: its scalar logic questions their prior habits, more often than it prescribes new ones.

In the previous chapter, I argued that *écologie intégrale* is a 'world-oriented' rather than 'I-oriented' religious ethic (Mattingly 2014; Piliavski & Sbriccoli 2016): its *telos* is not directed towards the care of the self (Foucault 1984) but towards the 'care for our common home' (Pope Francis 2015), including the environmental care for the planet and the social care for its population, plagued by global inequality. But the absence of a clear I-oriented *telos* does not, to my mind, prevent the use of analytical frameworks recently developed in the anthropology of ethics to address 'ethical reasoning and practice' (Laidlaw 2014: 104). Specifically, I argue that the principle of subsidiarity is employed by my interlocutors as a 'mode of subjectivation' or 'technique of self-formation'[100] (Foucault 1986 [1984]: 26-8; 1997: 263-6; Laidlaw 2014: 103), albeit one whose *telos* goes beyond the self itself to encompass the world. In this chapter, I therefore explore, within the political theology of *écologie intégrale*, the particular mode of subjectivation that is subsidiarity: I aim to show how my interlocutors think with and through subsidiarity in order to calibrate their actions and life-choices for the sake of the Common Good.

[100] Practices that 'permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on – their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct – and this in a manner so as to – transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state – of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power' (Laidlaw 2014: 101; on Foucault 1997: 177, 255). Here, the principle of subsidiarity is directed towards agents' conduct and everyday actions – and the 'certain state' desired is a state of the world rather than the self.

As a scalar logic predicated on finding 'the smallest scale *appropriate*', the principle of subsidiarity drives my interlocutors to question several concomitant and concatenated scales of belonging and acting – the family, the workplace, the food production and distribution chain, the village, the neighbourhood, the region, the Nation, the European Union (cf. Holmes 2000; Shore 1993, 2005), the diocese, the universal Catholic Church. This process, epiphenomenally but inescapably, intersects awkwardly with the Republican scalar imaginaries of French nationhood.

A troubling red herring: The political theology of the 'Benedict Option'

French media commentators are not unjustified in worrying that young Catholic intellectuals' transhumance to small provincial towns and rural villages indexes a desire for religious communalism. Indeed, this exact process has been very explicitly advocated recently by conservative Catholics in the United States, garnering world-wide attention – including among my Lyonnais interlocutors, who insist that it is precisely what they are *not* doing, and agonise over the risk that the two projects will be conflated by undiscerning external observers. To launch this chapter's exploration of the modes of subjectivation of *écologie intégrale*, I start by addressing what *Les AlterCathos* consider to be a red herring: a seeming convergence between two political theologies, which they labour to disambiguate in the eyes of their own audiences.

James Laidlaw's (2010) case study of diasporic 'Eco-Jains' who are attracted to global environmentalist and animal liberation movements alerts us to the complex interfaces between ethical traditions with similar surface practices, but different underlying *teloi*. Laidlaw illustrates that, while younger generations of diasporic Jains highlight convergences between Jain practices and ecological ones – for instance, Jain vegetarianism and Western veganism – these are undergirded by two very different conceptions of the impetus to 'do no harm'. While veganism in the West is supported by a biophile vision of the world whereby Nature – animals and plants – must be protected from human-caused harm, Laidlaw shows that the ethical tradition of Jainism, rather inversely, holds that Jains must renounce and escape a cosmos which is fundamentally defined by suffering (2010: 77). Laidlaw therefore concludes that 'Eco-Jains'' dialogue with ecological discourses involves questioning and renegotiating – in ways which are not yet settled – the 'cosmology and metaphysics', 'conception of the self', and 'catalogue of virtues' of the Jain tradition (*ibid*.; MacIntyre 1988: 349). A similar ethical negotiation is at stake in *Les AlterCathos*'s dialogue with a competing

Catholic political theology which has gained public visibility in France recently. Contrary to the 'Eco-Jains', however, *Les AlterCathos* are trying to sustain divergence rather than articulate convergence. It is they – preempting the anthropological observer – who call attention to ethical incompatibilities between two seemingly similar political theologies within the single tradition of Catholicism. In this process of disambiguation, *Les AlterCathos* confirm core elements of their own ethical project.

In 2017, Rod Dreher, an American editor and a self-defined 'conservative' Catholic, published *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*. Addressed primarily to Catholics, but with the ambition to gradually convince all Christians (including Orthodox and Protestant) in the USA, *The Benedict Option* proposes to combat what it sees as the disappearance of genuine faith and religious practice in the modern 'post-Christian' nation by concentrating the faithful into self-standing communities. Spurred by Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981), it aims – according to its dust jacket – to counter the new 'spiritual crisis' and 'culture war' of the 'dark age that has overtaken us' in the secular liberal West. Drawing inspiration from the sixth-century development of the earliest Christian monasteries, whose communal living was heavily regulated according to edicts drawn by their founder, Saint Benedict, *The Benedict Option* calls 'to embrace exile from mainstream culture and construct a resilient counterculture' (Dreher 2017: 120). Despite its explicitly USA-centric approach, the book's cover is illustrated with a photograph of the French Mont-Saint-Michel: rising from the mist of dawn, in soft blue and gold tones, the outline of the island topped by its tall church spire is intended to suggest the mutually-constitutive self-sufficiency and devoutness of Dreher's proposed new Christian communities.

The 'Benedict Option' is not centrally an evangelizing project. Instead, it is premised on changing the life fabric of the devout Christians who might follow it: by fostering solely-Christian neighbourhoods, schools, and professional networks, Dreher argues that Christians will be better able to reflexively pursue a scripturally-observant lifestyle in all aspects of their family lives, education, friendships, professional choices, medical choices, devotional practices, and political participation. By 'political participation', Dreher does not mean 'campaigns, elections, activism, lawmaking – all the elements of statecraft in a democracy' (2017: 88). Instead, he views Christian politics as the 'process by which we agree on how we are going to live together' (*ibid*.) in countercultural communities inspired by Václav Havel's notion of 'antipolitical politics' and Václav Benda's notion of 'parallel *polis*' (Havel 1978, Benda 2017, in Dreher 2017: 91-96). *The Benedict Option* can be analysed as promoting an

extreme form of religious 'anti-syncretism', as Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw label '[demands] for purification for the sake of an untainted authenticity' (1994, in Schielke & Debevec 2012: 5): here, the anti-syncretism at hand is both doctrinal and socio-political.

Immediately successful among conservative Catholic circles in the United States and United Kingdom, the book was translated into French[101] within the year. It spurred a certain amount of skepticism among French Catholic spheres regarding Dreher's avocacy of a 'communalist withdrawal' (B.Dumont 2017: 5) – the phrase used by critics, *le repli communautaire*, is not a theological term but one which is usually employed in French discourse to critique anti-Republican forms of communalism (Bowen 2007: 156). Nonetheless, most of the influential French Catholic newspapers and blogs credited Dreher with a sound overall intention, that of vivifying faith and piety in Catholics' everyday lives; and the book was widely cited and discussed[102].

On the surface, many of the features of the 'Benedict Option' resemble those of *écologie intégrale*. Dreher recommends detachment from the democratic politics of the nation; *Les AlterCathos* encourage their audiences to distance from party politics and consider politics as a quotidian matter (Chapter Three). Dreher advocates the creation and consolidation of Catholic communities; *Les AlterCathos* run an explicitly Catholic café and attempt to draw into it a wider socio-cultural network known as *la cathosphère* (Chapter Four). Dreher encourages Christians to forsake liberal modernity (cf. Harding 2001; Orsi 2012: 148); *Les*

[101] The translation included significant changes to the marketing style. On the cover of the French edition, the photograph of the Mont-Saint-Michel is replaced by a childishly colourful drawing of houses; one of which, topped by a small greyish cross, can only be identified as a church at second glance. The title is also edited: the book is rebranded as *How to be Christian in a World Which is Christian No Longer*, with a smaller subtitle: *The Benedictine Gamble* (Dreher 2017, trans. Darbon). By removing the Mont-Saint-Michel, a recognisable landmark for French readers if not necessarily for American ones, and extending the title to a 'post-Christian "world"' rather than 'nation', the editorial choices involved in the translation shy away from invoking the thorny question of the Christian past of the French nation, and the even thornier one of its potential re-christianised Benedictine future. In fact, rather than an objective 'option', the revival of Benedictine regulations and communities is framed as a 'gamble' (*le pari bénédictin*). The lack of a translator's preface prevents a conclusive assessment of the extent to which this de-politicised and somewhat dubitative presentation may have been deliberate, but it is quite possible that it was – for their part, both the Spanish and Italian translations conserved the Mont-Saint-Michel front cover and the title of 'option'.

[102] Cf. Chapter Two regarding the preponderance of book publications and philosophical debates within elite Catholic spheres.

AlterCathos promote an anti-liberal and anti-capitalist paradigm. Dreher promotes 'exile'; *AlterCathos* members and other young Catholic intellectuals move with their families to small towns and rural villages. Throughout the autumn of 2017, during the final months of my fieldwork, Committee members of *Les AlterCathos* worried that their project of *écologie intégrale* might be conflated with Dreher's better-publicised communalist paradigm on the basis of abductive observations – if it looks like a (Benedictine) duck, then so must it be. Popular secular media had, by that time, already started reporting in critical terms on young Catholics' relocation to provincial areas, but the mainstream press were not the main reason for *Les AlterCathos*'s worry. Instead, the Committee were concerned that Catholic audiences, who were more likely to have read or heard about Dreher's manifesto in the first place, might believe that *Les AlterCathos* were engaged in instantiating a Lyonnais version of the 'Benedict Option'; and might therefore approach *Le Simone* with erroneous expectation of the association's aims and values.

The topic of communalism was directly addressed, and *Les AlterCathos*'s own intent clarified, on the occasion of the first meeting of the '*Laudato Si'* in Action' workshop of the school-year 2017-18 (Chapter Four). It was held in *Le Simone* shortly after the early-September publication of the French edition of *The Benedict Option*, at the peak of the initial debates about the book's contents. The meeting was chaired by André, a student in theology at the nearby *Université Catholique*, who had come to France from his native Ivory Coast for the sake of these studies and was therefore a relative newcomer to the bourgeois Catholic spheres of Lyon. In recognition of his role as convenor of the LSiA workshop, André had recently been included into the Committee of *Les AlterCathos*, and had taken active part in their internal discussions about Dreher's book.

André started the meeting by reading out a paragraph from *Laudato Si'* which, he told us, would be easy to mis-interpret. Since this inaugural meeting gathered a number of attendees who had not participated in previous years of the LSiA workshop, or even read *Laudato Si'* themselves, André wished to avoid misguided assessments of the encyclical's – and the workshop's – objectives. The paragraph he chose is one in which Pope Francis oulines the moral core of his encyclical:

> Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. [...] Ancient [biblical] stories, full of symbolism, bear witness to a conviction which we today share, that everything is interconnected, and that

> genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others. (Pope Francis 2015: §70)

It would not be acceptable, André expounded, to read this paragraph through a selfish lens (*une optique égoïste*): to see 'my relationship with my own self' (*ma relation intérieure avec moi-même*) as the finality of the relationships built 'with my neighbour'. The 'duty to cultivate and maintain' a 'proper relationship' with the people around oneself, André warned, is not to be interpreted as a validation of *l'entre-soi* – the decision to live 'among ourselves' in communities of similar class and religion[103]. Instead, he concluded, it is a call to be truly attentive to the social and material conditions which enable each of one's neighbours to live a full and fulfilling life (*une vie pleine et épanouie*). André therefore addressed a word of welcome and of reassurance to all new workshop participants, explaining that they could participate in the workshop's 'ecological conversion' (*conversion écologique*; cf. Lafage 2020: 15-21; Hermann & Hermann 2020: 81-96) even if they were not Catholic, but simply motivated by the conviction that 'we do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children'[104].

André's pointed exegesis of the passage from *Laudato Si'* made no mention of *The Benedict Option*, but was rather transparent in its opposition against Dreher's advocacy of Christian communalism, for those LSiA attendees who were themselves part of the Catholic spheres concurrently debating the recently-published book. By contrast with his amicable tone when articulating Catholic and non-Catholic ecological discourses, André was firm in his efforts to disambiguate two possible Catholic orientations towards the world. The 'Benedict Option' and *écologie intégrale* may have had similarities in practice, but André's intervention

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[103] I do not believe André's forcefulness in making this point was intended to comment on his own (successful or not) inclusion into Lyonnais Catholic spheres a few years previously – he had a forthright character and did not, to my knowledge, engage in insinuations. Nonetheless, he was aware that among the participants of the workshop were conservative bourgeois Catholics who might approve of, or at least not take issue with, the prospect of *l'entre-soi* ('among-ourselves').

[104] '*Nous n'héritons pas de la terre de nos ancêtres, nous l'empruntons à nos enfants*'. The quote is attributed to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1939), a native of Lyon, one of the most beloved local historical figures. Like some of the 'Eco-Jains' discussed by James Laidlaw (2010), André considered the convergences between religious and non-religious ecological discourses from the standpoint of the religious tradition first and foremost – rather than a meeting of distinct ecological discourses on equal terms, André's presentation foregrounded the ways in which *écologie intégrale* can encompass and include other traditions and non-religious actors.

clarified and insisted on the incompatibility of their underlying ethical architectures. In theoretical terms, they differ in two of the four criteria outlined by Michel Foucault to recognise and analyse ethical modes of subjectivation (Foucault 1986 [1984]: 26-8; 1997: 263-6; in Laidlaw 2014: 103). Rod Dreher's book is predicated upon the improvement of Christian faith, and its readers are expected to engage with it both 'as' and *qua* devout Christians (Thesis Introduction; Maritain 1927). Broadly speaking, the 'Benedict Option' is to Catholicism what revivalist movements are to Islam, or radical Pentacostalism to Protestant Christianity: movements which have been analysed as 'fundamentalist' for their insistance on scriptural and/or clerical authority and pious discipline, and for their rejection of liberal modernity in favour of social conservatism (Harding 2001; Orsi 2012: 148). Its deontology – 'the ways in which people position themselves in relation to their ideals of injunctions or rules' (Laidlaw 2014: 103) – and its teleology – the kind of being that the ethical subject aspires to be (*ibid*.) – differ altogether from those of *écologie intégrale*, which neither presumes a deontological premise of devout Christianity, nor expects such a pious *telos* (Chapter Four).

While both political theologies issue forth from the same religious tradition, they have opposite moral and spatial 'centres of gravity'. The 'Benedict Option' is centripetal: both spiritually and socially, it gravitates towards or withdraws into (*repli*) its Christian core. *Écologie intégrale*, on the other hand, is centrifugal: its moral catalyst resides in the exogenous 'neighbours' – including the most distant ones on the scale of the planet, whose care can be undertaken by promoting environmentalism and social equality according to the adage that 'everything is interconnected' (Pope Francis 2015: §70). André's next task in the '*Laudato Si'* in Action' workshop was to clarify, for his audience, how to grapple with this universalist scope in practice.

The principle of subsidiarity: A matter of scale

'The great difficulty of putting *Laudato Si'* in action is not to figure out what *should* be done for Earth and for humanity, but to determine what we are called to do ourselves,' André explained to the assembled audience. He continued:

> Pope Francis does not ask us to be superheroes. He does not ask us to abandon our lives, he asks us to transform our lives in what measure we can, on our scale. There is nothing worse than the hypocrisy which consists in saying, *I can do nothing big*, when we have not

> confronted the smaller inequalities and pains which surround us. There is always more fraternity[105] to be built in our days and in our lives.

In this inaugural '*Laudato Si'* in Action' meeting of the year, therefore, participants were immediately given a filter through which to read the encyclical: the lens of scale. Because 'everything is connected', André explained, seemingly minor efforts to ameliorate the quality of a community's life on a small scale are a valuable contribution to the effective implementation of *Laudato Si'* on a quantitatively large scale, that of the planet – and therefore, the commitment to 'care for our common home' does in fact begin 'at home' on a daily basis.

The scalar vision André was alluding to is not outlined explicitly in *Laudato Si'* itself, but draws on a longer history of Catholic scalar thinking, articulated in a notion called the 'principle of subsidiarity'. Subsidiarity is only mentioned twice in *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis 2015: §157, §196), and in my experience its lexicon is only used with complete familiarity by the minority of Catholics who have extensive knowledge – either as academics[106] or as members of the clergy – of the full range of the encyclicals of the Church Social Teaching[107]. The founding members of *Les AlterCathos* had explored this principle in the early years of their association, which had been devoted to discussing the Church Social Teaching (Chapter Three); and André, although a latecomer to the association, was familiar with this principle due to his academic background in theology. *Les AlterCathos*'s conceptual and practical uses of the principle of subsidiarity follow the pattern explored throughout Chapters Three and Four with reference to *écologie intégrale* more broadly: the first stage entailed articulating the

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[105] The mention of brotherhood or fraternity, *fraternité*, takes on an additional layer of meaning in the French context, where it is the final third of the Republican motto of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'.

[106] The following academic sources on *Laudato Si'* were read by or written by *Les AlterCathos*: Revol & Ricaud 2015; Hériard Dubreuil s.j. 2016; Conférence des Évêques de France 2017; Danroc & Cazanave 2017; Dufoing 2017; Hermann & Hermann 2018; Lang 2020; Lafage 2020; Hermann & Hermann 2020.

[107] When my interlocutors described the source of their awareness of the principle of subsidiarity, they cited religious texts (e.g. encyclicals) and religious events (e.g. conferences) rather than contemporary political contexts in which subsidiarity has been a matter of public discussion, such as the 1992 and 1999 debates surrounding the creation of the European Union and its monetary union (Shore 1995; Holmes 2000). It is quite likely that my interlocutors, who were in their late-20s and early-thirties in 2017, had been too young to follow debates about European subsidiarity in the 1990s. Instead, when they discussed European subsidiarity, it was as one instance of the principle they had discovered through the CST.

'theory' of subsidiarity in intellectual terms, before considering modes and forms of putting it into practice in *Le Simone*. The following definition of subsidiarity in conceptual terms corresponds to the way it was explained to me by André and several other *AlterCathos* Committee members, who hoped I would then learn to 'spot' its presence in action.

'Subsidiarity', *AlterCathos* Committee members explained, was first laid out as a principle in Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*. The text, as its name suggests, was written to mark the fortieth anniversary of the publication of another core document of the Catholic Church: Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*, the very first papal writing in a series that would later be gathered into the Compendium of the 'Church Social Teaching'. *Rerum novarum*, subtitled *Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor*, responded to the Industrial Revolution and to the attendant two-pronged rise of socialism and capitalism by offering a third, Catholic option. Among other suggestions, Leo XIII encouraged labour unions, defended private property, and attempted to sketch out the responsibilities of governments to protect the physical and spiritual integrity of the working classes. In 1931, Pius XI returned to those concerns – where his predecessor's stance on private property had earned him the reputation of siding with the bourgeoisie over the proletariat, Pius aimed to restore Leo's good name and explain once more the reasons for Catholicism's equal dislike for capitalism and communism [108] . The Catholic perspective laid out throughout *Quadragesimo anno* emerges through a discussion of the mutual constitution of rights, responsibility, and dignity. Pius argues simultaneously that private property should be protected as the rightful fruit of one's labour, and that evangelisation should be a priority among the lower classes in order to educate workers to the dignity they acquire through their own labour:

> This constant [pastoral] work, undertaken to fill the workers' souls with the Christian spirit, helped much also to make them conscious of their true dignity and render them capable, by placing clearly before them the rights and duties of their class, of legitimately and happily advancing and even of becoming leaders of their fellows. (Pius XI 1931: §23)

Moving from the economic sphere to the political one, Pius carries out a similar argument, namely, that men should be entitled to labour and responsibilities concerning their own lives,

[108] *AlterCathos* Committee members occasionally expressed fellow-feeling for Pope Leo XIII on the basis of being similarly engaged in attempting to temper bourgeois lifestyles with ideals of social justice, without antagonising or alienating audiences on the basis of their socio-economic backgrounds.

not only for the sake of the economic or social outcomes of these positions, but also for the sake of their integral development and dignity. Consequently, he argues, governments should limit the centralisation of tasks, at any scale:

> It is a fundamental principle of social philosophy, fixed and unchangeable, that one should not withdraw from individuals and commit to the community what they can accomplish by their own enterprise and industry. So, too, it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and a disturbance of right order, to transfer to the larger and higher collectivity functions which can be performed and provided for by lesser and subordinate bodies. Inasmuch as every social activity should, by its very nature, prove a help to members of the body social, it should never destroy or absorb them. (Pius XI 1931: §79)

This paragraph, nestled towards the middle of the encyclical and not particularly emphasised, was later taken up as the definition of the principle of subsidiarity, which the *AlterCathos* Committee readily paraphrase as 'the principle of the smallest scale appropriate' (*le principe de la plus petite échelle appropriée*), and summarise as 'do not administer on a large scale what can be done on a smaller scale'.

This conceptual definition of subsidiarity frames the *AlterCathos* Committee's contemporary reading of *Laudato Si'*. They consider that the implementation of the connected ecological and social themes of *Laudato Si'* must proceed through *Quadragesimo Anno*'s teachings on the correlation between dignity and small-scale labour and responsibility. Through the lens of subsidiarity, *Les AlterCathos* draw out a scalar element of the 'Care for our Common Home' advocated by Pope Francis: they consider not just the objects of care, namely the planet and its people, but the act of caring itself, constrained by this scalar co-constitution of labour, fraternity, and dignity[109].

Among the *AlterCathos* Committee, it is explicit that the principle of subsidiarity underpins, on a microcosmic level, the organisation of the café *Le Simone* (Chapter Four). The *AlterCathos* Committee's rejoinder that all members of *Le Simone* should feel free to launch and sustain new activities is an attempt to foster the cycle of personal liberty, responsibility, and dignity set out by Leo XIII and Pius XI. *Stricto sensu*, the Committee's 'hands-off' approach to regulating the activities held in *Le Simone* enables them to successfully avoid the administration of events on a large scale when a smaller one would suffice. Furthermore, by

[109] Due to a decision not to include elements of prayer or devotion in the daily life of their association and café (Chapter Four), *Les AlterCathos* do not engage with the element of evangelisation and pastoral care present in Pius XI's discussion of the dignity of industrial workers.

encouraging individuals to undertake their *own* projects, rather than delegating pre-determined tasks, they promote the relationship between personal labour and peer leadership described in *Quadragesimo Anno*. To reuse the words employed by Pius XI, it is by encouraging newcomers to invest in discrete 'social activities' that these individuals eventually become wholly members of *Le Simone*'s 'body social' (1931: §79). After setting into motion this subsidiary organisation within *Le Simone,* the *AlterCathos* Committee considered two further challenges: how to apply the principle of subsidiarity in their everyday lives more widely, and how to encourage others to share in this mode of subjectivation.

From 'localism' to 'subsidiarity': A problematic transition

We return to the '*Laudato Si'* in Action' workshop, and to André's efforts to mediate through a scalar lens new participants' discovery of the encyclical's call to environmental and social action. Each September, the first two meetings of the LSiA group focus on the ecological and human stakes of the mass-market food industry. Workshop members research and present short briefings on food production, distribution, and consumption; and the overall aim of these two sessions is to encourage new participants to consider shopping for local produce as a first tentative step towards greener and more fraternal consumption habits. By buying local produce, workshop participants are told, they can simultanously boycott the overly-large and environmentally-costly distribution networks of supermarkets, and empower local producers (Lafage 2020: 103-108).

This first focus on food is a deliberate tactic, André admitted to me, which soothes the audience's possible apprehensions about the difficulty of putting *Laudato Si'* in action. The topic of food allows André to draw out clear-cut, readily implemented instructions, before introducing the encyclical's more complex topics later down the line. Following in the footsteps of the two women who had run the seminar in previous years, André purposely uses the topic of local vegetables in order to ease his audience into discovering the core connections drawn by the encyclical: the connection between ecology and human dignity, and the connection between a global crisis and individual efforts on a local level. As a pedagogic approach, André invites his audience to focus on what he considers to be a proxy – local produce – before gradually encouraging them to think about other green and fraternal efforts they can undertake on the scale of their local communities. By the end of the year, André hopes, his audience should understand that just as the purchase of locally-grown produce is

only a particular instantiation of a broader attitude towards 'the local', so is 'the local' itself only a particular instantiation of a fully subsidiary mode of '[caring] for our common home'.

What the Pope argues in his encyclical, the LSiA workshop explores each year, is that environmentalism and charity – respectively the care for the planet and the care for the poor – are each crucial on their own terms, but that the full realisation of one necessitates the full realisation of the other. Francis's mantra is that 'everything is connected': a 'biocentric' but anthropophobe (2015: §118) approach to ecology will fail to save the planet if it does not address humanity, and in particular the sweep of human lives responsible for, and suffering from, climate change and the collapse of biodiversity. Vice-versa, traditional Catholic charity misses the mark if it does not ensure that all populations across the globe retain a livable environment. The question of transport is particularly illustrative of the feedback between environmentalism and charity: by scaling down one's travels, and prioritising the train over planes and car journeys, one contributes to limiting pollution and climate change, and this in turn helps to protect vulnerable coastal populations across the globe whose livelihoods are threatened by rising sea levels. Therefore, the personal injunction that the majority of my Lyonnais interlocutors took away from their growing awareness of *Laudato Si'* was that, firstly, they should be more environmentally-friendly in their daily lives, and secondly, they should renew – or begin – their commitment to the age-old New Testament injunction to care for the poor, the weak, 'the least of these brothers and sisters' (Matthew 25:40). These twinned commitments, André explains to LSiA workshop participants each year, benefit several scales of the 'common home', since 'everything is connected' – from the smallest scale of the family home, to the somewhat larger scale of the interpersonal networks centred around one's house, then onwards and upwards to the largest scale of our home planet.

In 2017, André's focus on food consumption and travel as entrypoints into subsidiary practices easily convinced members of the '*Laudato Si'* in Action' workshop of the value of local scales of action in terms of environmental benefits – less transport of persons and goods means reduced carbon emissions. However, the question of charity – Pope Francis's joint priority alongside environmentalism – proved more complex to navigate, and challenged *Les AlterCathos*'s early hopes that a shift to subsidiary lifestyles might be straightforward. Several *AlterCathos* members and *Simone* regulars had previously volunteered with charities abroad – a few had travelled to Erbil, Iraq in 2014, and then to Mosul in the spring of 2017, to carry out international aid efforts coordinated by Lyon's Cardinal Barbarin – a practice that they were now re-evaluating, ends versus means, pitting the merit of their presence in Iraq

against the critical carbon footprint of the plane journey. Neither André nor the other *AlterCathos* Committee members had a clear solution to the problematic realisation that it would be rather retrogressive for them, as well-off, privileged Catholics, to fall back on 'local' charity close to home.

In the autumn of 2017, the question of 'local' charity was raised among *Simone* regulars by a young father – an old hand of the '*Laudato Si'* in Action' workshop – who had been alerted to the plight of Syrian refugees in Lyon. Refugee families had been instructed by governmental organisations to enroll their children in specific schools in and around Lyon, but had been provided with accommodation situated very far from these schools. Since regular school attendance was a requirement of their refugee status, several Syrian families slept in the streets close to their children's schools, rather than occupy their impractically-distant official accommodation. Several *AlterCathos* members working in primary or secondary education found themselves teaching homeless Syrian children, and many others knew that their own school-aged children had refugee classmates. For weeks after the start of school in September, a collective created by local teachers and parents – all regular or occasional visitors of *Le Simone* – campaigned to be allowed to take charge of housing the Syrian families attending their neighbourhood schools. They argued firstly that the national administration in charge of these families was proving to be slow and ineffective, and secondly that, on principle, the care for these newcomers should be their own responsibility. They claimed that *les parents d'élèves*, the collective noun referring to all the parents of the student body in each school, should be allowed to provide for the welfare of newly-arrived Syrian families, thereby including the refugee parents into their fold and fostering the integration of the entire family into the neighbourhood community. To their great disappointment and anger, this proved impossible to set up, as the administration in charge of housing the refugees did not have the werewithal to delegate to any local civilian collective, however well-intentioned. This experience contributed to alerting *Simone* regulars to the points of friction (Tsing 2005) between subsidiary scales of action promoting the 'smallest scale appropriate', and those of the nationwide State administration.

While *Les AlterCathos*'s renewed sense of responsibility for the poorest inhabitants of the immediate vicinity had some positive outcomes – they persevered in helping the Syrian families, providing food and clothing and hosting 'study groups' in their own homes to allow refugee children and parents alike to stay indoors in the evenings after school – they occasionally expressed worry that a greater investment in their own already-existing local

networks, at the scale of the school community for instance, might be a 'cop-out' from more impactful forms of charity – and that it might be (perceived as) a form of neighbourhood-based bourgeois *entre-soi*, or socio-cultural communalism. One of the *AlterCathos* founders, who had been particularly invested in Cardinal Barbarin's exchange program with Christian communities in Iraq – but who now took seriously the impetus not to harm the environment by taking frequent plane journeys between France and the Middle East – chose to resolve the conundrum of 'local charity' in a radical way. He moved with his family to Lebanon on a three-year contract with a Franco-Lebanese NGO: he and his wife would both work at a community school in a poor neighbourhood of Beirut, teaching high-school philosophy and primary school classes respectively, while volunteering among vulnerable Maronite Christian communities at the weekend and during school holidays. When explaining this choice to a crowd of regulars gathered in *Le Simone* one evening, the *AlterCathos* founder admitted that it had not been an easy decision to make: his three young children would only see their grandparents once a year at Christmas, but they would grow up learning that a charitable life can be conciliated with everyday family life.

In short, *Les AlterCathos*'s efforts to evaluate their own prior commitments according not only to broad ideals of environmentalism and charity, but also to the more pointed 'principle of the smallest scale appropriate', yield neither straightforward nor always comfortable answers. Part of the complexity experienced by *Les AlterCathos* and the regulars of *Le Simone* is due to the scope of actions which can fall under the remit of subsidiarity: taking seriously Pope Francis's motto that 'everything is connected', in my interlocutors' experience, leads to ethical conundrums not only on a daily basis but in every sphere of life. In his discussion of Michel Foucault's notion of 'modes of subjectivation' or 'techniques of the self' (Foucault 1986 [1984]: 26-8; 1997: 263-6), James Laidlaw lists a range of possible ethical 'ascetics': the forms one's self-forming activity can take, from stringent techniques to others 'diffusely woven into forms of life, in work or other routines or in decisions over clothing, food, sleep, exercise, or sex' (2014: 103). As a mode of subjectivation, subsidiarity is 'diffusely woven' indeed, and can come to encompass most of the above elements of daily life: for example, *Les AlterCathos* held a secondhand clothes-swap event in *Le Simone* to counter the mass-market clothing industry which not only violates human dignity in sweatshops but also wastes huge quantities of water. And as far as sex is concerned, women

in *Le Simone* have recently started to question the Pill[110], arguing that while it *is* a means of offering dignity to women in their sexual and reproductive lives, large-scale pharmaceutical lobbies can also be critiqued for having promoted it far beyond any other means of contraception, to the extent of turning the Pill into an almost mandatory commitment for all women, constraining their liberty – in their view – and possibly harming the hormonal and emotional health of some (cf. Durano & Bastié 2017: 57; Ducoeurjoly 2017: 68-69; Durano 2018).

It is with reference to this mode of subjectivation – to the application of *écologie intégrale* through the means of subsidiarity – that the recent trend of young Catholic intellectuals moving to provincial small towns (*une petite ville, un bourg*) and rural villages (*une bourgade, un village*) must be apprehended. Indeed, not only are rural or provincial lifestyles generally considered more 'green' than life in large urban centres such as Lyon or Paris, they also allow a streamlining of the multiple networks of work, home, school, sports, and so on in which environmentalism and charity must be promoted. While those Catholic intellectuals who moved to villages are 'visible'[111] in the eyes of the press, the less-noticeable majority of their friends who remain in Lyon also strive to foster degrowth (*un mode de vie décroissant*): my Lyon-based interlocutors also attempt to integrate, as far as possible, their daily networks. Some have transferred their children to schools near their home rather than in more distant *arrondissements* (districts) of Lyon; others now attend the Sunday Mass closest to home instead of travelling further afield to specific traditionalist or charismatic parishes; and one turned down a job promotion which would have required him to work in Paris two days per week. All of these adjustments reduce transport and pollution, and encourage the development of stronger community ties across their respective neighbourhoods.

Scalar ascetics: Is the 'smallest scale appropriate' always small?

I have so far described ways in which *Les AlterCathos* employ subsidiarity to effect change in their daily lives, often by attempting to reduce or 'de-grow' (*décroître*) the scale of their

[110] It has remained unclear to me what proportion – if any – of the women who regularly attend *Le Simone* might be on the Pill. While two of the women in question explicitly said they weren't – and had several young children with short age gaps to 'prove' it – the rest did not comment on their personal choices in matters of contraception.

[111] Cf. Chapter One on the ambiguity of Catholic (in)visibility in the public sphere (Oliphant 2019).

environmental and economic impact on the planet. In this final section, I address more subtle traces of subsidiarity in my interlocutors' daily lives: not changed actions, but a transformation of perspective which leads them to value on different terms some of their pre-existing activities. In turn, this exploration showcases an important element of subsidiary ascetics: in the course of reflecting on the 'smallest scale appropriate', my interlocutors also engage with the possibility that certain scales of life might be inappropriately small.

I have described in Chapter Four the diversity of events which take place in *Le Simone*. After six months of fieldwork in Lyon, I was accustomed to thinking of *Le Simone* in terms of its disparate inner pieces; the constellation of events and seminars which each attract fluctuating audiences instead of sustaining one single group of attendees that I could reliably label, for the purposes of this thesis, '*Le Simone*'s community'. But one interlocutor, Thibault Mathulin, encouraged me to shift my perspective away from viewing *Le Simone* as the division of a whole – a single association fractured into many activities – and instead see it as the making of a whole, reunifying practices which would otherwise be split and scattered across separate locales.

I never knew Thibault very well – I knew his older cousin Benoît Mathulin better, because he volunteered as a barista for *Le Simone* to stay busy during a period of unemployment, and I knew his brother-in-law Auguste Paladru best of all, because I saw him every day in *Le Simone*'s coworking area, where he had chosen to base his activity as an independent photographer. Thibault, by contrast, flitted in and out of *Le Simone*, sometimes in the day, sometimes during the evening conferences, accompanied by a revolving door of friends as well as his fiancée Diane and his cousin – Benoît's sister – Joséphine Mathulin. But it was Thibault who drew my attention to the role played by *Le Simone* in the lives of the Mathulin 'clan', as they affectionately referred to themselves. One summer evening, when they had gathered for drinks around two café tables pushed together, he gestured at the group: 'look at us'. Hélène Paladru, Thibault's sister and Auguste's wife, had a rare evening off from her demanding job as a nurse at the Children's Hospital, and Thibault pointed out that she was able to join the relaxed evening without having to choose between her husband, her siblings, and her cousins because 'so many of us are already here anyway'.

Le Simone gathers in one locale a variety of activities which the Mathulin clan could have otherwise experienced in a far more fragmentary way. It is simultaneously a place of work – volunteer work in the café for Benoît, independent work in the coworking space for Auguste, guaranteeing their regular presence on the premises – and a place of leisure *away* from work

for Hélène. It is a place of intellectual construction and personal growth for Thibault, Benoît, and Joséphine who, among the group, are the most committed to conference attendance and participation in the '*Laudato Si'* in Action' workshop; but outside of conference hours, it is also an undemanding place which encourages spontaneous gatherings and idle communal conversation. Because *Le Simone* has an *AMAP* partnership with a local agricultural producer, it is the place where Diane collects crates of fresh vegetables on Tuesday nights; and because one *AlterCathos* Committee member runs weekly comic-drawing workshops, it is where Joséphine dabbles in art on Saturday mornings.

None of the Mathulin clan belong to the historical core of *Les AlterCathos*'s founding philosophers, but they are pillars of *Le Simone*'s social core of invested regulars. Thibault had heard about the association through his mother around the time of the opening of *Le Simone*: Madame Mathulin, who lives in Provence, had started paying close attention to the goings-on of the diocese of Lyon when so many of her children, nieces, and nephews moved to the bigger city in their twenties and thirties to follow academic or professional opportunities. Following his mother's advice to attend *AlterCathos* conferences, Thibault quickly chose to get involved in the association. *Le Simone* was about to open: he volunteered to set up the modalities of the coworking side in 2016, and then mentioned the brand-new and very cheap coworking space to his sister, Hélène, who in turn advertised it to her husband Auguste. The latter was seduced by the pricing of the work area, and orchestrated something of a mass migration among his friends, away from another more expensive coworking space and towards *Le Simone*. By the summer of 2017, when Thibault called my attention to *Le Simone*'s multifaceted presence in his family's life, he had taken a step back from direct involvement in running the coworking area – but by then, a half-dozen Mathulins had stakes in the continued existence of *Le Simone* as a locale for diverse activities intertwining family and friends, work and leisure, personal development and collective integration.

It is easy to find, in Thibault's recounting of his family's history with *Le Simone*, echoes of the processes of decentralised personal investment already described in the previous sections; but from Thibault's perspective, *Le Simone*'s many opportunities for pursuing individual goals crucially allowed the members of the Mathulin family to strengthen their collective bonds. As Thibault pointed out, the shared space of the café even gave her siblings and cousins a chance to see Hélène, the busy nurse. Later the same summer evening, with his family gathered around the tables on the pavement in front of the café, Thibault made himself the spokesperson for the Mathulin clan as he elaborated on the conceptual terms which, for

him, define *Le Simone*. He called it a '*tiers-lieu*', a word which was unfamiliar to me and could ambiguously mean 'third place' or 'place of thirds'[112].

Thibault proceeded to illustrate the concept of a *tiers-lieu* through a description of a new initiative carried out by another Catholic association, the *Association Lazare*, who specialises in re-homing homeless persons in cooperative lodgings shared with Catholic youths or families. *Lazare* had recently renovated a farm on the outskirts of Paris, where two families now lived collectively along with a half-dozen previously-homeless men (and later women), with joint responsibility for the upkeep of the building and for running a sustainable polyculture business (Belhomme 14/09/2016). According to Thibault, this was a textbook example of a *tiers-lieu*: a place where the three 'thirds' of home life, work life, and community life could be reunited to lessen the fragmentation of neoliberal lives. *Le Simone*, he concluded, functions similarly. Even though no-one technically lives on the premises, forms of family life inside *Le Simone* – such as the dynastic ubiquity of the Mathulins, but also the common company of small children encouraged by a well-stocked play area in a corner of the café – allow the presence of an element of 'home' alongside the labour and community more obviously present in the space.

Thibault's assessment that a truly fulfilling life – for oneself and for one's neighbours – should ideally be achieved in *tiers-lieux* reuniting the usually scattered elements of family, labour, and community sheds a different light on the definition of subsidiarity as the 'principle of the smallest scale appropriate'. It highlights that it is possible to scale lives down *inappropriately far* – a critique which Thibault addressed to 'neoliberal lives'. Thibault's template of the *tiers-lieu* as a space which is simultaneously a total entity and split into three self-standing thirds suggests that each of these scales – the whole and its subdivisions – has its own merits. For Thibault, the value of *Le Simone* derived from its ability to simultaneously foster independent sub-groups – each with their own purpose, e.g. work in the coworking,

[112] Thibault suggested that I should refer to Roy Oldenburg's sociological work on 'third places' (1989) in order to better understand the importance of *tiers-lieux* in the construction of 'the neighbourhood' as an imagined community and as a scale of public discussion (Anderson 1991; Habermas 1992). But Oldenburg's 'third places' are called *third* places because, conceptually, he considers that they supplement and balance out individuals' 'first' home sphere and 'second' work sphere; acting as the third leg of a tripod to stabilise the post-Industrial Revolution division between domesticity and labour (1989; 1997:6). This is rather different from Thibault's own definition of *tiers-lieux* as places which combine rather than partition the three 'thirds' of family, labour, and community life.

intellectual activity in the conferences, ecological consumption at the *AMAP* – and to coalesce these sub-groups into one wider community, circumscribed by the locale of the café. In other words, Thibault's scalar reflection was not limited to identifying one, singular, 'most appropriate' scale of life – such as 'the local', the neighbourhood, or the café – but rather entailed an assessment of the segmentary articulation of several such scales (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1940; Ben-Yehoyada 2017).

Thibault's parts-and-wholes vision of *Le Simone* suggests that my Lyonnais interlocutors' concern with scales does not have 'smallness' as its overarching finality, or decentralisation as its only mechanism. Subsidiarity, as they put it into action, is not only about scaling down when possible, it is also about curating and sustaining the discrete existence of concatenated wholes – such as the individual, the family, the community of the *tiers-lieu*, the neighbourhood, and so on – and, in some circumstances, resolving the problems of atomised or inappropriately small forms by scaling *up*.

The press articles described at the outset of this chapter offer ready examples of this multi-directional, evaluative scalar thinking. What reporters tend to notice and focus on are the elements of downsizing: Hilaire and Mathilde Broie de Bugey, newly-settled in a small town with their two young children, promoting a 'locavore' lifestyle (Guyet & Cuccagna 26/10/2015) – among my interlocutors, Auguste and Hélène Paladru were among those who also made the choice of moving to the countryside after the birth of their first son. But the interviews with Hilaire and Mathilde also showcase instances of scaled-up practices, such as when Mathilde explains that 'for laundry we use the local laundromat' (Gonzague 05/11/2016). While this is not spelled out explicitly in the interviews, the 'principle of the smallest scale appropriate' goes both ways: by buying local produce, Hilaire and Mathilde boycott large distribution networks and empower local agricultural businesses; and by using the village laundromat, they signal their belief in the greater sustainability and cost-effectiveness of communal appliances. In this case, the 'smallest scale appropriate' is deemed to be that of the collectivity, while family-owned washing machines are considered superfluous. Throughout, Hilaire and Mathilde sustain the good of several concatenated scales: the good of their own family, of their village community, of the economic cooperatives gathered around the communal laundromat and the local organic farms, and, because 'everything is connected', their efforts of degrowth contribute to the good of 'Our Common Home' on the largest scale of the planet.

Conclusion: Being subsidiary in a Republican nation

At the start of this chapter, I described an ongoing moral panic, in the French mainstream press, about the noticeable trend for young Catholic intellectuals to leave urban centres and settle in small provincial towns and villages. Hilaire, Mathilde, or any of these young newly-rural Catholics (*néo-ruraux*, Léger & Hervieu 1983; Hervieu-Léger & Hervieu 2005) are rarely, if ever, asked by interviewers why they took the step of moving to the countryside – what they think they are doing. Instead, the very fact that they *did* move is perceived to be the proof that Catholics are shifting over to the far-right. News reports suggest, more or less explicitly, that the rise in ecological commitment among Catholics *isn't about* ecology, but is merely a symptom, an 'avatar' (Brésis 09/02/2015) for a broader, nefarious political recombination. It is thought that an 'ultraconservative Catholic young guard' is in the process of forming a new 'ultrareactionary' 'tribe' (respectively Sauvaget 06/09/2015; Blin 05/05/2019; Gonzague 05/11/2016).

I argue that the agitation provoked on the national public stage by these instance of small-scale Catholic ecology hinges on a mistaken or miscommunicated understanding of the ethical project at stake, and of the scalar modes of subjectivation entailed. As I have shown in this chapter, not only are external, secular commentators struggling to interpret this trend, but there are also contestations among Catholics themselves as to the moral finality of Christian-led community projects. Three different ethical projects – at least – can underpin young Catholic intellectuals' choice to move to the countryside: an integralist, far-right politics aiming to return to the Christian and rural ethno-cultural 'roots of France' (Stolcke 1995; Holmes 2000); an anti-syncretic, fundamentalist project of religious communalism aiming to create material conditions for truly faithful Christian lives through 'exile from mainstream culture' (Dreher 2017: 120; Harding 2001); and finally, the lesser-known political theology of *écologie intégrale*. Contrary to the centripetal withdrawal (*repli*) and communalism (*entre-soi* or *communautarisme*) advocated by the first two ethical projects, the third is a world-oriented religious ethic of care, articulated through the belief that 'everything is interconnected', and mediated through a subsidiary vision of how individual efforts scale into a global *telos* of environmental and social wellbeing.

But even though it is neither integralist nor anti-syncretic – that is, it neither advocates for class-, culture-, or faith-based forms of separatism – the project of *écologie intégrale* nevertheless intersects poorly with the Republican scalar imaginaries of French nationhood. After the French Revolution, one of the founding principles of the new political order was the

idea that all citizens should have equal and unmediated access to the Republic – unmediated by the toppled estates of the *Ancien Régime*, namely the aristocracy, the clergy, and the Third Estate, but also by 'intermediate corporate bodies, such as guilds and religious groups' (Bowen 2007: 160). In this political paradigm, it is through the 'processes of direct communication between the state and citizens' (*ibid*.) that citizens can not only be equal but also free: the Revolutionary Republican state was intended, in ur-Foucauldian terms, as 'the domain in which citizens realize their freedom' (Kriegel 1998; Bowen 2007: 15). The scalar imaginary of the Republic, in which there are two key scales – the individual citizen and the overarching Republic – therefore entrenches a moral 'conception of the self' (MacIntyre 1988: 349) whereby freedom and human dignity are dependent on, and provided by, the primordial existence of the Republic.

The paradigm of *écologie intégrale* has a rather different view of the articulation between the self, the collective, and the pursuit of dignity. Following Leo XIII's (1891) and Pius XI's (1931) encyclicals on the Industrial Revolution and workers' dignity, *Les AlterCathos* articulate a 'conception of the self' (MacIntyre 1988: 349) whereby individual dignity goes hand-in-hand with collective labour and the opportunity for free, personal investment and responsibility. This conception of the self was summarized to me by David Coureau, the President of *Les AlterCathos*, as:

> a refusal of the scission between private self and public self, between labour and intellectual life, and between labour and leisure or intellect and leisure.

In line with this, David explained that opening *Le Simone* had allowed *Les AlterCathos* to:

> show – for those who notice it – our Christian anthropology (*notre anthropologie chrétienne*[113]): our integral vision of man. […] We unify several dimensions of human life which should never have become entirely self-standing: labour, sociability with the folk-dances and poetry events, corporeal life with the food and drink, and intellectual life.

This view of the self, and of the places which allow a fulfilling life – such as *Le Simone* and, more widely, what Thibault called *tiers-lieux* – does not look to the Republic as a source of freedom and dignity, putatively flowing down unmediated from the State to its citizens.

[113] The notion of an 'integral Christian anthropology', mentioned by Pope John Paul II during a speech in Puebla (1979: §I.9, §III.2), follows the original etymology of *anthrôpos-logos* to indicate the ontological nature of Man – 'in God's image' – according to the Church.

Instead, it values precisely the 'intermediate corporate bodies' (Bowen 2007: 160) which, on small and local scales, foster collective labour and sociability.

Nonetheless, as I have shown in this chapter, *écologie intégrale* does not *only* value small and local scales. One large scale which my interlocutors evidently and wholeheartedly embrace is the global scale of the Pope's doctrinal and exemplary reach, which they see as superseding – 'appropriately' – the occasional tensions and debates in smaller subsets of the Catholic Church, such as national Conferences of Bishops or lay Catholic populations (Napolitano 2016; Senèze 2019). Following the principle of 'the smallest scale appropriate', my interlocutors therefore reflect on, identify, and promote large scales of action when they consider them to be most 'appropriate' for given environmental or fraternal purposes. This is why Mathilde and Hilaire, although they forgo a fridge and washing machine to reduce their energy consumption, do not desire to be energetically self-sufficient or to go 'off-grid'. Instead, they encourage the promotion of green energies at a national level, on the basis that no smaller scale has the resources to orchestrate the energetic transition away from fossil fuel yet. In the same vein, many *AlterCathos* members have recently subscribed to green energy providers, who use the nationwide power circuits to circulate electricity produced via renewable energy sources: in this case, centralised national infrastructures are considered to be an optimal scale allowing growing numbers of consumers to transition from fossil to green sources of energy.

In addition to nationalised infrastructures, the French Republican ideal of equal and 'unmediated' access between citizens and the state is embodied in an extensive and centralized state administration, which distributes directives and delegates certain responsibilities from the centre in Paris, downward and outward to the regional peripheries. In the course of scrutinizing different scales of life for their potential 'appropriateness' and value, *Les AlterCathos* engage with these administrative scales – renewing an engagement with statecraft and democratic processes which they had set aside in the early years of the association. Recently, *AlterCathos* members have lobbied municipal and regional councils on matters of environmentalism: these administrative scales of the State, who hold a certain amount of executive power, can be viewed as 'appropriate' scales to obtain practical outcomes. For example, following lobbying from a collective headed by Marie Sève and her housemate Solène, whom we met in Chapter Four, several municipal districts of Lyon have now banned the installation of new digital advertising screens at bus stops and metro stations – a waste of energy, in my interlocutors' view, and a source of alienation through the

pressures of mass-market consumption. In this way, through the logic of subsidiarity, my interlocutors find value in discrete scales of State administration – but this value emerges from each scale *sui generis*, and not as a function of its relation to the Republic as a whole.

Les AlterCathos's political endeavours have therefore become profoundly different from the politics of conservative Lyonnais Catholics explored in Part One – that is, their own background and the politics in which they engaged until recently. Whereas *La Manif Pour Tous*, in 2013, had been an attempt to curate 'the world' at the scale of the nation-state – with reference to 'natural' reproduction, but also to the fundamental co-constitution between the Nation and the families defined by its Civil Code – *Les AlterCathos* no longer prioritise the scale of France above any other. Moreover, whereas *La Manif Pour Tous* had been centrally articulated around the impetus to negotiate protesters' presence in the public sphere in terms of 'religious' or 'secular' identities, this is no longer a matter of pressing concern for *Les AlterCathos*. The central 'mode of subjectivation' of *La Manif* had entailed reflexive thought (Foucault 1997: 117; Laidlaw 2014: 102) about the distinctions between acting 'as' Catholics, *qua* Catholics, and 'as' French citizens, but this modality has faded away in *Le Simone*, where 'ethics of efficacy' largely prevail and subsidiarity serves as the main mode of subjectivation in the joint pursuit of ecology and fraternity.

When Marie lobbied the French government in 2013, and when she lobbied Lyonnais mayors and regional councillors in 2018-2019, the analytical difference[114] between the two endeavours was therefore more complex than it might seem at first glance. On the face of it, both events entail a Catholic actor engaging with the French administration. Both are underpinned by ethical projects, and both projects are political theologies, that is, 'world-oriented' religious modes of engagement with the political – indeed, both are even grounded in the same, Catholic tradition. But the 'world' they are 'oriented' towards is not the same, either in terms of its scale or of its other defining properties. It is by attending to these changing efforts to curate 'good worlds' that we can take the measure of the ethical, political, and to a certain extent spiritual journey undertaken by Marie Sève and *Les AlterCathos* in the past decade. Indeed, while Marie's political theology is still intrinsically Catholic, it has

[114] And here I mean 'difference' strictly analytically. It is acutely obvious – to *Manif* protesters, to supporters of marriage equality and reproductive rights, and especially to anyone who has personal stakes in either – that the decision to campaign against 'Marriage for All' is incommensurate – in its legal, moral, and emotional repercussions – with small-scale lobbing regarding matters of publicity. Marie would wholeheartedly agree that a fundamental order of magnitude separates the two.

undergone a ‘radical’ transformation – in both senses of *radix*: rooted yet radical (Bès 2017), continuous yet ruptured (Robbins 2007a; 2007b).

CONCLUSION

‘Everything is Connected’

Vatican vignettes #1: The ‘baby of paper’

In July 2018, the Vatican marked the 3rd anniversary of the publication of *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* by convening an International Conference gathering lay and clerical Catholics who had, in the intervening three years, taken a particular engagement to put *Laudato Si’* in practice. Out of fewer than ten representatives from France, three were members of *Les AlterCathos*: Marie Sève, and a couple called Johannes and Mahaut Herrmann[115]. After receiving invitations to the Conference, all three spent a few days debating the wisdom of taking the plane to Rome and back: was their personal desire to meet the Pope worth the carbon footprint? They eventually resolved that the opportunity to meet with other advocates of *Laudato Si’* from across the globe was too good to pass up: all attendees had been instructed to bring objects and stories presenting their local forms of environmental and fraternal effort, and the three *AlterCathos* members hoped to draw inspiration from these worldwide examples of *Laudato Si’* in action.

For their part, Johannes and Mahaut brought a brand-new copy of their recently published book on the collapse of biodiversity (2018). The book, destined to a Catholic or Christian audience, retraces religious conceptions of Nature and reminds its readership of the importance of attending to the critical extinction of animal and plant species, within broader

[115] ‘Johannes and Mahaut Herrmann’ are pseudonyms used by the couple in their journalistic and literary publications (e.g. 2018; 2020).

engagements with climate change. Several years in the writing, this text had been imbued by Johannes and Mahaut with very high hopes that it would help bring *Laudato Si'* to the attention of wide audiences across France. But there was another emotional element to this recent publication: it was, in Mahaut's words, the couple's first 'baby of paper' (*bébé de papier*).

Mahaut and Johannes cannot have children. As long as I have known them, they have been very open about this source of suffering. They married very young, and tried to start a family for over a decade before coming to the conclusion that, due to medical circumstances, they would never be biological parents. Both Mahaut and Johannes are very well-known public speakers among French Catholic spheres; they regularly publish articles in Catholic newspapers and journals, travel across France to give conferences about ecology, and sustain an active correspondance with many associations. They are very present on social media, where they share insights into their daily lives, thoughts, and struggles: every year on Mother's Day and Father's Day, Mahaut and Johannes post heartfelt messages celebrating the beauty of parenthood and expressing compassion towards any of their Facebook friends or Twitter followers who, like themselves, might find these festive occasions to be lonely and painful reminders of their own infertility.

These posts on social media attract a large range of equally-heartfelt responses from relatives, friends, and more distant acquaintances. Some evoke Mahaut and Johannes's political engagements: 'Learning of your difficult circumstances,' wrote a woman in 2017, 'I am even more impressed by your courage in the fight against medically-assisted procreation and surrogacy during LMPT [*La Manif Pour Tous*]'.

'Of course, and thank you', was Mahaut's sober response. Like other *AlterCathos* members, Mahaut is uncomfortable with recurring mentions of *La Manif* as the 'be-all and end-all' of Catholic political participation – even though it is true that she had, in 2013, taken it all the more seriously for knowing that she was campaigning against reproductive technologies which could have made her a mother, had she not chosen to defend 'natural' filiation.

Others attempt to lift the couple's spirits by highlighting the value of their ongoing public commitments: 'Infertility is an ordeal,' commented an older man the same year, 'but you must be comforted by the thought of your intellectual fertility, which touches many more [i.e. more people than a hypothetical number of children] and ensures your legacy'. Mahaut did not view this message with a good eye: 'We are conscious that it is a privilege to be able to pursue our intellectual activities both invidually and as a couple,' she wrote back, 'and we are

thankful for it, but on days like these I would thank you not to compare the benefits of a productive mind against the pain of empty arms'.

A year after these messages, however, when Mahaut and Johannes completed the draft of their first jointly-written book, they both expressed that it had been cathartic to bring this 'baby of paper' into the world together. Among traditional Catholics, young parents occasionally travel to Rome with newly-baptised babies in order for them to be blessed by the Pope. Johannes and Mahaut held this tradition in mind when they gifted a copy of their book to Pope Francis on the occasion of the International Conference. The gesture showcased their efforts to promote *Laudato Si'* across France; but more poignantly, it was the occasion to ask for the Pope's blessing in carrying out their lives *as a family*, albeit a family of two, in service of the 'Care for Our Common Home'.

Dissertation Summary

In this thesis, I have explored the ways in which highly-educated, bourgeois French Catholics engage with and in 'the political'. I argued that these political or 'worldly' engagements are informed by changing visions of how, as Catholics, they can contribute to the formation and maintenance of a good world – visions which, in turn, are informed by shifting articulations of cultural 'roots', political tradition, and religious doctrine. Building on anthropological discussions of how 'religion' in the modern world comes to be defined (Asad 1993), publicized (Engelke 2013), and discursively partitioned from the domains of politics and culture (Fernando 2014); and in dialogue with anthropological literature on the ethical construction of good religious selves (Deeb 2006; Marshall 2009), I made a case for an investigation of 'good religious worlds'. By exploring transformations in the worldly commitments of French Catholics through the frame of 'political theology', this thesis offered a new angle for analyses of cultural and religious change (Robbins 2004), and contributed ethnographically to the growing anthropology of Catholicism (Mayblin *et al* 2017) while complementing more longstanding accounts of secular French Republicanism (Asad 2006).

In 2015, Pope Francis published an encyclical letter calling Catholics around the world to 'Care for Our Common Home', spurring lay French Catholics to envisage new engagements with worldly concerns such as climate change and global inequality, and highlighting continuities and transformations from their prior modes of engagement with politics. The lay Catholic population of France is very far from homogeneous, and its subsections undoubtedly

hold different conceptions of their own place in society and role in caring for the world at large. I have argued, however, that French Catholics hold unique affordances when engaging with politics at the scale of the French Republic. By virtue of their longstanding engagement with imaginaries of national 'order', and due to their ability to foreground Catholicism as 'culture' rather than or in addition to faith in the secular public sphere, French Catholics are able to seamlessly imagine themselves to represent 'real' Frenchness and the whole 'France'. By negotiating their presence in the secular public sphere on those terms, I argued, French Catholics can therefore manipulate or resist categorization as a 'religious minority' (cf. Favret-Saada 2017). Focusing on the *cathosphère* of conservative, middle-class Catholics in the city of Lyon, I showed how these French Catholics navigate the paradoxes of their place in the secular Republic; cross-cutting boundaries of public and private as they engage in political protests about the family (Robcis 2013), and challenging ideals of Republican cultural integration as they attempt to prevent the de-christianization and 'uprooting' of 'French culture' (Oliphant 2015). I interpret this form of French Catholic 'worldly' commitment as a broadly secular political theology oriented towards the scale of the French nation-state, defined by and in response to the secular nature of the Republic. Often implicit rather than clearly articulated, this mode of engagement with the political is largely predicated upon negotiating whether, when, and how Catholics may act *explicitly as* Catholics (*en tant que catholiques*) in the secular French public sphere – and how to deploy or withhold this religious identity in the course of claiming to represent *the French*.

Within the Lyonnais *cathosphère*, I highlighted the role of an association of young philosophers, *Les Alternatives Catholiques*, who endeavour to transform conservative French Catholics' political habits and introduce a new political theology which is predicated neither on the scale of the nation-state nor on *Frenchness*, but instead follows Pope Francis's call for 'interconnected' fights for environmentalism and social justice. I argued that in the course of developing an initially 'prefigurative' (cf. Krøijer 2015) Catholic political epistemology, *Les AlterCathos* maintained an engagement with their socio-cultural roots and the value of 'rootedness' overall, but put these roots in service of a new, 'radical' political engagement. Through ethnographic descriptions of *Les AlterCathos*'s recently-opened café *Le Simone*, and a discussion of *Les AlterCathos*'s use of 'subsidiarity' as a scalar mode of subjectivation (Foucault 1986; Laidlaw 2014), I explored the ways in which *Les AlterCathos* put into practice the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* – both applying, and further constructing, the 'grand scheme' of this new political theology in their 'everyday lives' (Schielke & Debevec

2012). While *Les AlterCathos* primarily aim to transform conservative Catholics' political concerns, and prioritize them as audiences, I showed that they nonetheless include lapsed- and non-Catholic members in their project: I therefore argued that *écologie intégrale* is a 'world-oriented' ethic (Piliavsky & Sbriccoli 2016) in which personal piety is a variable rather than a deontological requirement or paramount *telos*.

Throughout the thesis, I offered snapshots of two particular modes of Catholic engagement with 'worldly' considerations and the political: *la cathosphère* and *Les AlterCathos* share a juxtaposition of traditional socio-cultural roots, French citizenship, and Catholic faith, but I traced how they come to articulate these into two different 'political theologies'. I therefore suggested that further engagements with religious actors' 'worldly' commitments need to attend to the articulations and modes of subjectivation of these 'world-oriented' religious ethics without *a priori* assumptions about the place of piety or the role of politics within.

'Rooted' politics

A first running thread throughout this thesis has been my French Catholic interlocutors' concern with 'roots' (*racines*) and rootedness (*enracinement*), articulated and expressed in different ways by the conservative *cathosphère* and the 'radical' political epistemology of *Les Alternatives Catholiques*.

Throughout Part One, references to 'roots' featured predominantly as a vector of 'cultural Catholicism' (cf. Mayblin *et al* 2017). They are a point of contention between multiple Catholic and multiple Republican conceptions (cf. Bowen 2007: 11-13) of the history, culture, and identity of the French nation. Historians have argued that, since the early-2000s and especially since the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the Parisian *Collège des Bernardins* in 2008, French Catholicism has shifted into a retrospective and conservative modality of 'desire for the past' (*désir de passé*, Pelletier 2019: 284). During his visit to Paris, Benedict XVI claimed that French and European culture are grounded in 'Christian roots': anthropologists of France have argued that this narrative has, since, allowed French Catholics to bring Christian culture into the public sphere, for instance in conferences and the arts, by labelling it as a shared element of national culture and therefore as a crucially 'secular' heritage (Oliphant 2015). My exploration of conservative Catholics' engagements with public politics and with philosophical conferences on 'general culture' both confirmed and complicated this picture.

In Chapter One, which addressed the ways in which family and politics intersected for French Catholics in the course of the 2013 anti-same-sex-marriage protest *La Manif Pour Tous*, I showed that right-wing French Catholics employ references to the abstract past in order to present themselves as the repositories of French 'order' (L.Dumont 1977). The rarity of their participation in street demonstrations (*manifestations*) over the past decades has sustained, I argued, the chronotope of right-wing Catholicism as a long-standing, slow-changing, 'orderly' representation of the 'real France', by contrast with more fast-paced images of progress associated with left-wing demonstrations. The rare instances of French Catholics' presence 'in the streets' ('*les cathos sont dans la rue*') are themselves predicated on what they consider to be the 'natural' order of the private family, threatened in their view by reforms to the school system and to marriage laws and reproductive rights. The 'roots' claimed by conservative Catholics in the course of these protests are not only considered to be inalienable foundations of the family and of the State's provisions for filiation and national belonging; they demand to be acted on and protected.

I showed that this association of French Catholics with long-term order is nonetheless heavily contested. On the one hand, I explored how news reports focusing on the 'incivilities' committed during *La Manif Pour Tous* – such as a breakaway cohort who illegally attempted to protest on the *Avenue des Champs-Élysées*, the mythical avenue symbolizing 'France' in its entirety – contributed to portraying Catholics as a source of social *dis*order, illegitimately crossing boundaries between public and private and thereby causing a risk to the order of the secular public sphere. On the other hand, I showed that right-wing Catholic protesters' recognizably traditional clothing and families also proved a point of contention: signs of traditionalism, far from evoking an orderly past encompassing the 'whole' of France, were mobilized by critics as a means to portray the protesters of *La Manif* as an un-representative minority, both in terms of class and of religion.

In Chapter Two, which addressed bourgeois Lyonnais Catholics' efforts to protect French *culture générale* ('general culture') and prevent the 'death of transmission', the stakes of claims to 'rootedness' became further explicit. I showed that, in the context of conference centres preparing élite students for examinations organised by the national Ministry of Education, highly-educated Catholics undertake a 're-christianization' of the 'general culture' associated with the French Nation and the Republican ideal of integration – despite finding themselves at odds, in this respect, with recent governmental instructions which view conceptions of 'general culture' as discriminatory and therefore anti-Republican. Nonetheless,

I argued that their efforts to protect the Christian 'roots' of 'French culture' do not – at least in the context of these conferences associated with education – index a rise of communalist 'integralism' among conservative Catholics (cf. Holmes 2000), or a desire for a re-christianization of French society overall (cf. Elisha 2011). I showed that they are undertaken, in my interlocutors' view, for the sake of the continued transmission of high status French 'high culture'. This is discursively presented as a public-serving rather than self-serving effort to sustain inalienable pieces of French history and culture – a narrative concomitantly rendered equivocal by the acknowledgment that Catholic students might benefit, in national examinations, from the cultural capital gained by being the rare repositories of this knowledge among their peers. I suggested that contestations over *culture générale* therefore entail negotiations of the French nation as a whole and its mechanisms of Republican integration. Outlining the critiques formulated either by French Catholics or contemporary governments inspired by Bourdieusian social sciences regarding one another's conceptions of culture, I argued that these critiques are isomorphic: each lay claim to 'true' French culture and accuse their detractors of manipulating this culture for the sake of particularistic interests. Overall, Part One argued that French Catholics' claims on the history of France and on its cultural 'roots' pose a challenge to Republican understandings of secular politics and national culture.

Part Two details a different emic understanding of 'roots', developed by *Les Alternatives Catholiques* in the course of their creation of a new Catholic political epistemology. I showed how *Les AlterCathos* came to question their own socio-cultural biases, developed a hermeneutics of suspicion vis-à-vis their own background, and later reconciled with their 'roots' by including them and articulating them within a framework of 'radicality'. Moving away from understanding roots as inalienable and programmatic, *Les AlterCathos* instead actively select which 'roots' they wish to claim by drawing inspiration from historical figures from France and beyond. In this framework, 'rootedness' – with *any* roots, not just Catholic or French ones – is seen as a virtue which helps to combat the alienation and 'up-rooting' of the neoliberal, capitalist world. I therefore argued that *écologie intégrale* forms a 'hierarchical encompassment' (Robbins 2013b) whereby 'roots' are valued and celebrated at the same time as their inclusion in a 'radical' politics renders previous rooted frameworks obsolete.

This picture of a clear-cut intellectual framework whereby any rootedness can support individual participations in the world-oriented ethics of *écologie intégrale* was complicated in Chapter Four, which explored the practical instantiations of this paradigm in *Les AlterCathos's* newly-opened café *Le Simone*. Indeed, I showed that a certain measure of

awareness of, if not full familiarity with, Catholic culture and roots remains necessary in newcomers' introduction to, and early participation in, the communal project of *Le Simone*.

Chapter Five, finally, explored the ways in which *Les Alternatives Catholiques* deploy 'subsidiarity' as a mode of subjectivation to orient their personal practice of *écologie intégrale*. It argued that subsidiarity, as a scalar vision of the world, enables *Les AlterCathos* to contribute to the welfare of 'Our Common Home' on many concatenated scales simultaneously. It concluded that, by no longer placing any paramount emphasis on the scale of the nation-state, the paradigm of *écologie intégrale* detaches from nationalist imaginaries of rootedness and allows an investigation of French Catholics' political engagement on both smaller and larger scales of belonging and responsibility.

For an anthropology of political theology

The second thread running throughout this thesis has been an endeavour to develop 'political theology' as a flexible analytic for the study of religious actors' 'worldly' commitments.

In 2015, Pope Francis called on Catholics across the globe to 'Care for Our Common Home'. Drawing inspiration from this phrase, I have treated it in this thesis as a 'window into complexity' (Candea 2010: 34) calling forth ethnographic and analytical engagement with the ways in which religious actors, in diverse places and traditions, pursue worldly commitments to care for their respective 'common homes'. *What 'homes' do religious actors care about, and care for?* To what extent are they defined doctrinally or experienced in the everyday, by religious institutions and by lay actors? *What makes them 'common'?* To what extent do these 'common homes' map onto, question, or discard other collective imaginaries such as nations, states, ethnic boundaries, cultures, social movements, and indeed religious communities? *What forms are taken by religious actors' 'care' for them?* How do they envision their own agency to maintain desired orders and effect desired changes, and through what modes of subjectivation do they endeavour to do so?

By defining 'political theologies' as religious visions of how to order the political, I aimed to go beyond analytical interventions questioning the adequation between public religions and 'modernity' (cf. Casanova 1994). In part, this was motivated by the particular context of France, where the longstanding presence of Catholicism demands different analytical tools from contemporary studies of religious revivals across the globe (Harding 2001; Mahmood 2005). Historians of France have argued that the fierce contestations between French

Catholicism and secular Republican modernity throughout the 19th and early-20th centuries were powered by a contradictory 'double demand' (*double exigence*) for the French Catholic Church to both be 'of its time' (*de son temps*) and 'combat this time' (*combattre ce temps*) – in other words, to both find ways to inhabit the new secular order of modernity, and resist its gradual socio-cultural slide away from the values of Christianity (Pelletier 2019: 279-280). This paradoxical impetus which, at several points of the 19th and early-20th centuries, polarized French Catholics according to the progressivism or conservatism of their engagement with secular modernity, is comparable to many ethnographic accounts of the contestations and negotiations between pious revivalism and modernity in the early-21st century (Harding 2001; Deeb 2006) – critically, however, historians of France have argued that this historical account *no longer* accurately represents the contemporary place of Catholicism in France. Instead, they argue that the tripartite conflict between French modernity, progressive Catholicism, and conservative Catholicism started running out of steam after the Second World War, and rapidly ceased to be a relevant analytic in the interval between the mid-1960s (marked by the Council of Vatican II and the cultural revolution of May 68) and the mid-1980s (Pelletier 2019: 279-280). For the purposes of this thesis, my interest in 'political theology' as a broader and more flexible frame through which to explore religious actors' 'worldly' commitments was based on its ability to transcend the single index of modernity in explorations of French Catholics' public engagements.

'Political theology' appeared far more clearly in Part Two of this thesis than in Part One. When I started my fieldwork in Lyon at the end of the year 2016, I did not expect to study political theology – in fact, I had never heard the term – and it is through good luck and serendipity that I came to follow *Les Alternatives Catholiques* through their development of *écologie intégrale*, which they explicitly glossed as 'political theology' (*théologie politique*) and were only just starting to put into practice in their newly-opened café *Le Simone*. In this sense, what was remarkable about *Les AlterCathos* wasn't that they held a religiously-informed vision of the political, but that they focused on it almost to the exception of everything else, allowing the process of the creation and implementation of this new political theology to stand out *sui generis*. It is only because of the transparency of *Les AlterCathos*'s engagements with *écologie intégrale* – its intellectual and discursive construction, efficacious implementation, and its problematic new modes of subjectivation – that I was later able to search for similar, albeit more nebulous, mechanisms not only among the wider population of the Lyonnais *cathosphère* but also in the existing anthropological literature on pious politics

(Deeb 2006; Marshall 2009). While the ethnographic investigation of French Catholic 'roots' logically entailed placing Part One of this thesis – the *cathosphère* – before Part Two – its transformation by *Les AlterCathos* – the theoretical investigation of political theologies could be read the other way around.

In Chapter Three, I followed *Les Alternative Catholiques*'s initially 'prefigurative' and largely discursive efforts to 'renovate society, not the Church' through the development of a new Catholic political epistemology drawing on two sets of sources: the lives of world-wide historical Catholic figures, and the encyclicals of the Church Social Teaching. I argued that this development of a new 'grid of analysis' by lay Catholic actors complicates our understanding of the normative nature of Catholic doctrine, and of the exegitical power of lay Catholic actors, by calling attention to the ambiguous place of papal encyclicals in the Catholic tradition.

Chapter Four then explored *Les AlterCathos*'s efforts to instantiate *écologie intégrale* and transmit it to new audiences in their café *Le Simone,* creating but also managing a tension between ethics of efficacy and ethics of conviction. This chapter aimed to question the place of 'piety' as a *sine qua non* telos of subjectivation in studies of religious ethics; an aim continued in Chapter Five through the exploration of the alternate mode of subjectivation of 'subsidiarity'. Arguing that subsidiarity, as a scalar vision of the world, enables *Les AlterCathos* to contribute to the welfare of 'Our Common Home' on many concatenated scales simultaneously, Chapter Five concluded by drawing a contrast between this new political theology and previous, nebulous French Catholic conceptions of politics, largely predicated on the scale of the nation-state and on 'Frenchness'.

Indeed, despite the disappearance over the course of the 20th century of the 'double demand' for the French Catholic Church to both engage with and resist modernity, it is still possible to explore and analyse French Catholics' broad vision of politics, the political, and their own duty and capacity to defend their conception of a 'good world' on the public scene of the Republic. By contrast with the global concerns of *écologie intégrale*, I argued that the *cathosphère's* main scale of political engagement is that of France, and that the modalities of this engagement are centrally predicated on the secular nature of the Republican public sphere. I showed that whereas *écologie intégrale* is concerned with solving the interconnected suffering of the environment and the poor, conservative French Catholic conceptions of the political expressed over the second half of the 20th and early-21st centuries were centrally concerned with protecting 'good' visions of the private family – in the context of schooling

and education, and the context of reproductive bioethics – from the interventions of the State. And while *Les AlterCathos* orient their practice of *écologie intégrale* through the problematics of subsidiarity, I suggested that conservative French Catholics orient their presence in the public sphere through debates about whether and when they should participate in politics *explicitly as* Catholics (*en tant que catholiques*), thereby managing and strategising their own presence either as a secular 'moral majority' or a religious minority on the public stage (Favret-Saada 2017).

Overall, I showed that these two modes of visible presence by Catholics in the French public sphere do not straightforwardly index purely 'religious' endeavours – neither the *cathosphère* nor *Les AlterCathos* prioritize evangelization, devotion, or the application of religious doctrine *qua* 'doctrine' in their 'worldly' lives. Nor do they straightforwardly index purely 'political' aspirations: despite the absence of religious ritual and the relatively peripheral place of personal piety in both projects, they remain visible as 'Catholic' endeavours either in the eyes of their participants or in those of external secular commentators, leading to fraught negotiations and diverse forms of 'management' of these projects' ties to religion. The modes of subjectivation of 'Catholic' projects cannot be taken for granted, and are not always clearly articulated: even projects which are not conducted in the optic of piety – of acting 'as' Catholics, *en catholiques* – nonetheless remain 'Catholic' by virtue of their ties to Catholic actors and culture, and by virtue of Catholicism's encompassment of lapsedness (Mayblin 2017). To paraphrase Rane Willerslev, the worldly commitments explored throughout this thesis can be described as 'Not [piously] Catholic and Not *Not* Catholic' (2004). Vice-versa, in the particular context of the secular French Republic, French Catholics who endeavour to pursue public commitments while keeping their faith private can to a certain extent manage their identity *qua* Catholics (*en tant que catholiques*) – but rather than ever occupying a straightforward position as 'secular' actors, they remain 'Not Secular and Not *Not* Secular' (*ibid.*).

I therefore argue that a study of 'worldly' religious commitments requires suspending *a priori* assumptions that they are 'religious' only in proportion to their piety, and attending instead to the ways in which our interlocutors interweave, incorporate, or disambiguate religious and polical poles and index their own actions accordingly. I further advocate for an investigation into whether such emic conceptions of the articulation of politics and religion are experienced by our interlocutors as straightforward facts, or fraught negotiations. In other words, I believe that ethnographic encounters with interlocutors who consider piety and

politics to be completely coterminous (e.g. Deeb 2006) or completely distinct (e.g. French Republicanists in Bowen 2007) *matter*, not because they provides a glimpse into the 'nature' of religion or politics, nor because they define 'the' singular political theology of a given religious tradition (*contra* Gellner 1981), but because they signpost outliers allowing the comparative study of all the more messy political theologies in between. I hope to have shown, in this thesis, how this messiness plays out in the two cases of conservative French Catholics' engagements with the secular Republic, and of *Les AlterCathos's* 'radical' engagement with the environmental and social care for a planetary Common Home.

Coda.

Vatican vignettes #2: 'The girl with the potato'

The contribution of Marie Sève to the International Conference was far less emotionally charged than Mahaut and Johannes's *bébé de papier*, but it was nevertheless carefully thought-through. She planned to give the Pope a copy of *Les AlterCathos*'s conference program for the year which had just elapsed – a slim and brightly-coloured booklet symbolizing all the audiences whom *Les AlterCathos* had introduced to *écologie intégrale*. But Marie also prepared a surprise: she wanted to gift Pope Francis with... a potato.

Marie let me in on her plans for a potato-based surprise on the occasion of my return visit to Lyon in the early summer 2018. The potato (fam., *patate*) would be sourced from *Le Simone*'s partnership with a local vegetable producer, Marie explained, and it would serve both as a publicity stunt and as a genuine symbol for *Les AlterCathos*'s commitments. 'I want them all to remember me as "the girl with the potato"[116],' she enthused,

> If I just spoke about what we do, nobody would remember. But if I'm holding up the locally-grown *patate* as proof of the positive consequences of our engagements, that'll be more striking.

Elaborating on the vegetable metaphor, she continued:

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[116] '*La fille à la patate*'. Whenever Marie discusses her potato, she uses the term *patate*, a colloquial word, rather than the proper *pomme de terre*. This word choice also suggests a sly pun, since *une patate* can also be used to refer to a silly young girl – on social media, Marie entitled a series of posts 'a Lyonnais *patate* in the Vatican', which could be taken humorously to mean her own self as well as the vegetable.

> What's more, the *patate* really represents what we stand for! Our engagement for local economic and political systems, our rejection of large-scale distribution, of course, but underneath all that *l'enracinement*, rootedness. Rootedness, root vegetables, get it?

And she concluded, laughing: 'After all the fuss about the "Christian roots of Europe", I bet no-one expected to see someone actually brandishing a genuine Christian *root*!'.

True to her word, Marie did indeed hold up a potato while introducing *Les AlterCathos* to the gathered Vatican Conference. Once more proving the power of ironic signs as conversation starters, like the tongue-in-cheek décor of the café *Le Simone*, news about Marie's potato stunt spread like wildfire on French Twitter: picked up by Catholic blogs (Le Samaritain 10/07/2018) and even by secular Lyonnais newspapers (Ballet 09/07/2018), the story of the potato in the Vatican fulfilled its role of introducing even wider French audiences to *écologie intégrale*. However, among the participants of the Vatican Conference itself, the potato offered a successful moment of comedy but was far from a showstopper – Marie later somberly reflected that most of the Conference attendees came from less prosperous countries than France, grew their own food anyway, and had concerns of a far more pressing nature than Lyonnais Catholics' own crusade against large-scale supermarkets.

Johannes Herrmann summarised this sobering experience a few days later (07/07/2018) in a blog post which encapsulates all of the core themes of this thesis: concerns for the sake of families and nature, engagements with French and global scales of action, reflections on the role of the Church in promoting change, and through it all, a strong personal commitment, on the part of a Catholic author, to caring for the world. I leave the last word of this thesis to him.

> I wish everyone could meet these people from the Pacific Islands, the heart of the Amazon, from India or the Congo Basin, from Greenland or Burkina-Faso, who fight, there, every day, in their towns, villages, countrysides and forests, for their lands, their rivers, their families and their children. They would tell you why saving trees, wellsprings, the forest, why developping agroecology rather than oil wells, why limiting global warming to 1,5°C, and offering a decent future to all, is all the same thing. It is more than linked, *it is one and the same*. [...]
>
> We do not measure, in France, what *Laudato Si'* means across the world. For us, it is a preoccupation which is slowly starting to mobilise a minority within society. Elsewhere and especially in what we call the 'Third World', it is a surge, a vital breath (*souffle vital*) which translates into innumerable initiatives in service of the planet and the dignity of the poor, the little, the disenfranchised, the forgotten indigenous people, how else can I put it – *all of this at the same time, all of this together*. [...]

It was beneficial to widen our horizon beyond Franco-French considerations (fam., *franco-français*) – which are admittedly important, because the situation, the state, and the future of our country deserve reflection – but looking *beyond* is regenerating.

We Occidentals, Christian and non-Christian, faithful or not, do not fully grasp the role that the Church can play. I do not speak here of the institution, but of the network formed by the community of the faithful. [...] Everything that burgeoned here and there can now unite, roots can interlace like they do on the forest floor. A forest as large as the world.

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